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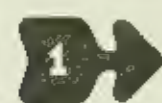
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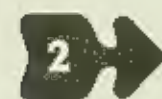


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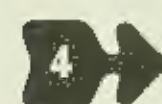


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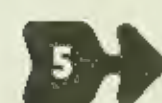


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☐ 40-49
☐ 50-59
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**THE EVERYTHING
IS FOR SALE ISSUE**

NO 49



EMIGRE

CHAPTER

1

INTRODUCTION

FIRST THINGS FIRST

NO 49

OF

THE





DESIGNER AND EDITOR: Rudy VanderLans
COPY EDITOR: Alice Polesky
EMIGRE FONTS: Zuzana Licko
OFFICE MANAGER: Tim Starback
SALES AND DISTRIBUTION: Ella Cross, Kristi Burgess
PHONE: (916) 451 4344
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Headlines, subheads, running heads and folios: Brothers and Council.
Text: Filosofia

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FOR NO. 4 P. 10

IN *Emigre* #47 WE PUBLISHED an interview with graphic designer Michael Shea who pointed out that the design press rarely covers issues dealing with the "effectiveness" of design in the marketplace. Shea argues that designers are singularly focussed on the formal functions and technological aspects of design, which is one reason why the general public has so little respect or understanding of it. He suggests that to properly evaluate design, we should take into consideration the fit between the client's purpose, the designer's application of meaning through design, and the way the consumer understands or responds to the finished product. In a reply to this interview in this issue's "The Readers Respond" section, designer Adam Richardson supports Shea's wish for a broader investigation of design. Richardson finetunes Shea's argument and points out that we need to improve on how we justify our design methods. He suggests that the design press and museums can play an important role in informing non-designers about how we work and what our goals are.

It's difficult to argue with Shea's and Richardson's assessments. There is much we can learn from our audiences and visa versa. But perhaps the reason why we do not see a deeper investigation of design's "effectiveness" in the press is because it begs a far more fundamental and pesky question that few designers care to address. Before we ask how "effective" a particular design is, should we not first ask if we really need the products that design so eagerly wraps itself around? Or at least question the effect that these products have upon our society? If the effectiveness of our designs is rarely discussed in the design press, our responsibility as designers towards society gets even less attention.

In 1994, *Eye* magazine printed an article by Andrew Howard entitled "There is Such a Thing as Society" (*Eye* No. 13, Vol 4.). It addressed design's social function and I found it poignant and thought-provoking. I remember writing to *Eye*'s then editor, Rick Poynor, that I would be surprised if the article didn't generate more letters to the editor than the infamous "Cult of the Ugly" article written by Steven Heller a few issues previously, which to this date is still often referred to. Well, surprised I was. The article generated a grand total of two letters in the following issue. This proved Poynor's prediction right in a reply to my letter that read: "I think most designers (like most people in any line of work) would prefer not to examine their personal relationships to society too closely, particularly if doing so might mean they have to modify or even abandon their line of work."

Andrew Howard's article also made reference to, and reprinted in full, the "First Things First" manifesto, which was issued in 1964 by designer Ken Garland and a group of 21 colleagues. The manifesto was a call to arms for graphic designers; an encouragement, as Garland put it, "to think about the opportunities for graphic design

and photography outside advertising." While the manifesto has been reprinted a few times (most recently in *Adbusters* magazine), it never generated much of a debate within graphic design, underscoring the disinterest with graphic designers to challenge the *status quo*, and/or the simple truth that most graphic designers accept their primary roles as corporate servants. Although written more than 30 years ago, the "First Things First" manifesto strikes me as being more relevant and timely than ever. Corporations are gobbling up the finest talents and the most personal artistic expressions to sell ever larger quantities of widgets. "First Things First" reminds us that there are alternatives, so we have reprinted it here once again, and built an entire issue around it.

SINCE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT of *status quo*, this is the final issue of *Emigre* in which we report and reflect on the state of graphic design. The heated debates of the late 80s and 90s seem to have run their course. During this period we witnessed changing technologies, a constant questioning of the established rules of design, and the surfacing of many new voices involved in critical writing. Debates flared up, spilling over from one design magazine to the other, centering on issues such as legibility, authorship, style, meaning, representation and other topics relating to our ever-changing profession. But as far as I can tell, there are no significant debates happening in graphic design today. No hot-button issues. Nothing that you can really sink your teeth into. Actually, there doesn't even seem to be much need for debates, just a lot of senseless cries for more "radical" work.

Perhaps I'm wrong. Maybe all kinds of critical issues related to graphic design are being discussed, and I'm just not noticing. Either way, we're changing our focus, hoping the next generation of graphic designers will fill the void and conduct their own debates and will enjoy the exercise as much as we have.

Starting with *Emigre* #50, our next issue, we will concentrate on typeface design, our first love, and use these typefaces and the pages of *Emigre* magazine to explore more personal ideas about the world we live in beyond graphic design. It's time to put our ideologies to work. And while I'm not entirely sure what that means, it sounds appealing enough that I'm going to try figure it out.

RVDL

CORRECTION!

WERKPLAATS TYPOGRAFIE

We accidentally listed an incorrect email address for the Werkplaats Typografie in *Emigre* #48. The correct email address is:

werktyp@xs4all.nl

The "First Things First" manifesto (see opposite page) was initially published in January, 1964. This call to arms proclaimed the sentiments of many creatives whose talents were quickly being mulched by the machinery of advertising agencies. Thirty-five years and three reprints later, "First Things First" has become more, rather than less, relevant. "The basis of [this] manifesto was to emphasize what we consider the false priority in spending," stresses participant Ken Garland, "but we also wanted to encourage students, designers and photographers to think about the opportunities for graphic design and photography outside advertising."



FIRST THINGS FIRST

ES
P.

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED, are graphic designers, photographers and students who have been brought up in a world in which the techniques and apparatus of advertising have persistently been presented to us as the most lucrative, effective and desirable means of using our talents. We have been bombarded with publications devoted to this belief, applauding the work of those who have flogged their skill and imagination to sell such things as: Cat food, stomach powders, detergent, hair restorer, striped toothpaste, aftershave lotion, before shave lotion, slimming diets, fattening diets, deodorants, fizzy water, cigarettes, roll-ons, pull-ons, and slip-ons.

By far the greatest time and effort of those working in the advertising industry are wasted on these trivial purposes, which contribute little or nothing to our national prosperity.

In common with an increasing number of the general public, we have reached a saturation point at which the high-pitched stream of consumer selling is no more than sheer noise. We think that there are other things more worth using our skill and experience on. There are signs for streets and buildings, books and periodicals, catalogs, instructional manuals, industrial photography, educational aids, films, television features, scientific and industrial publications and all the other media through which we promote our trade, our education, our culture and our greater awareness of the world.

We do not advocate the abolition of high pressure consumer advertising: this is not feasible. Nor do we want to take any of the fun out of life. But we are proposing a reversal of priorities in favour of the more useful and lasting forms of communication. We hope that our society will tire of gimmick merchants, status salesmen and hidden persuaders, and that the prior call on our skills will be for worthwhile purposes. With this in mind, we propose to share our experience and opinions, and to make them available to colleagues, students and others who may be interested.

Edward Wright
Geoffrey White
William Slack
Caroline Rawlence
Ian McLaren
Sam Lambert
Ivor Kamlisn
Gerald Jones
Bernard Highton
Brian Grimbly
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Harriet Crowder
Anthony Clift
Gerry Cinnamon
Robert Chapman
Ray Carpenter
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EMIGRE

CHAPTER

2

THE NEXT REVOLUTION

LASN AND DIXON

NO 49

88

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THE PEOPLE *VS* THE CORPORATE COOL MACHINE

HAS THE WILD HUMAN SPIRIT BEEN TAMED? IS AN OPPOSITIONAL CULTURE STILL POSSIBLE?

CAN WE LAUNCH ANOTHER REVOLUTION? **BY KALLE LASN**

THE NEXT REVOLUTION — World War III — will be waged inside your head. It will be, as Marshall McLuhan predicted, a guerrilla information war fought not in the sky or on the streets, not in the forests or around international fishing boundaries on the high seas, but in newspapers and magazines, on the radio, tv and in cyberspace. It will be a dirty, no holds barred propaganda war of competing world views and alternative visions of the future. We culture jammers can win this battle for ourselves and for planet Earth. Here's how. We build our own meme factory, put out a better product and beat the corporations at their own game. We identify the macro-memes and the metamemes — the core ideas without which a sustainable future is unthinkable — and deploy them. Here are the five most potent metamemes in the culture jammer's arsenal:

* **TRUE COST:** In the global marketplace of the future, the price of every product will tell the ecological truth.

* **DEMARKETING:** It's time to unsell the product and turn the incredible power of marketing against itself.

* **THE DOOMSDAY MEME:** The global economy is a doomsday machine that must be stopped and reprogrammed.

* **NO CORPORATE "I":** Corporations are not legal "persons" with constitutional rights and freedoms of their own, but legal fictions that we ourselves created and must control.

* **MEDIA CARTA:** Every human being has the "right to communicate" — to receive and impart information through any media.

Meme warfare — not race, gender or class warfare — will drive the next revolution.

Only the vigilant can maintain their liberties, and only those who are constantly and intelligently on the spot can hope to govern themselves effectively by democratic procedures. A society, most of whose members spend a great deal of their time not on the spot, not here and now in the calculable future, but somewhere else, in the irrelevant other worlds of sport and soap opera, of mythology and metaphysical fantasy, will find it hard to resist the encroachments of those who would manipulate and control it

ALDOUS HUXLEY WAS ON THE SPOT in the foreword of his revised 1946 edition of *Brave New World* — which, perhaps more than any other work of 20th century fiction, predicted the psychological climate of our wired age. There's a clear parallel between "soma" — the pleasure drug issued to citizens of *BNW* — and the mass media as we know it today. Both keep the hordes tranquilized and pacified, and maintain the social order. Both chase out reason in favor of entertainment and disjointed thought. Both encourage uniformity of behavior. Both devalue the past in favor of sensory pleasures now. Residents of Huxley's realm willingly participate in their manipulation. They happily take soma. They're in the loop and, by God, they love it. The pursuit of happiness becomes its own end — there's endless consumption, free sex and perfect mood management. People believe they live in Utopia. Only you, the reader (and a couple of "imperfect" characters in the book who somehow ended up with real personalities), know it's Dystopia. It's a hell that can only be recognized by those outside the system. Our own dystopia, too, can only be detected from the outside — by "outsiders" who did not watch too much tv when they were young; who read a few good books and then, perhaps, had a Satori-like awakening while hiking through Mexico or India; who by some lucky twist of fate were not seduced by The Dream and recruited into the consumer cult of the insatiates. Although most of us are still stuck in the cult, our taste for soma is souring. Through the haze of manufactured happiness, we're realizing that our only escape is to stop the flow of soma, to break the global communication cartel's monopoly on the production of meaning.

NEXT TIME you're in a particularly soul-searching mood, ask yourself this simple question: What would it take for me to make a spontaneous, radical gesture in support of something I believe in? Do I believe in *anything* strong-

ly enough? What would it take for me to say, this may not be nice, it may not be considerate, it may not even be rational — but damn it, I'm going to do it anyway because it feels right? Direct action is a proclamation of personal independence. It happens, for the first time, at the intersection of your self-consciousness and your tolerance for being screwed over. You act. You thrust yourself forward and intervene. And then you hang loose and deal with whatever comes. Once you start relating to the world as an empowered human being instead of a hapless consumer drone, something remarkable happens. Your cynicism dissolves. Your interior world is suddenly vivid. You're like my cat on the prowl: alive, alert, and still a little wild. Guy Debord, the leader of the Situationist movement, said "Revolution is not showing life to people, but making them live." This desire to be free and unfettered is hard-wired into each one of us. It's a drive almost as strong as sex or hunger, an irresistible force that, once harnessed, is almost impossible to stop. With that irresistible force on our side, we will strike. We will strike by smashing the postmodern hall of mirrors and redefining what it means to be alive. We will reframe the battle in the grandest terms. The old political battles that have consumed humankind during most of the 20th century — black vs. white, Left vs. Right, male vs. female — will fade into the background. The only battle still worth fighting and winning, the only one that can set us free, is *The People vs. The Corporate Cool Machine*.

FIRST WE KILL all the economists (figuratively speaking). We prove that despite the almost religious deference society extends to them, they are not untouchable. We launch a global media campaign to discredit them. We show how their economic models are fundamentally flawed, how their "scientifically" managed cycles of "growth" and "progress" are wiping out the natural world. We reveal their science as a dangerous pseudo-science. We ridicule them on tv. We pop up in unexpected places like the local business news, on commercial breaks during the mid-night movie, and randomly on national prime-time. At the same time, we lay a trap for the G-8 leaders. Our campaign paints them as Lear like figures, deluded kings unaware of the damage their deepening madness is doing. We demand to know why the issue of overconsumption in the First World is not even on their agenda. In the weeks leading up to their yearly summit meeting, we buy tv spots on stations around the world that ask, "Is Economic Progress Killing the Planet?" Bit by bit we maneuver the leaders into a position where suddenly, in a worldwide press conference, they are forced to respond to a question like this: "Mr. President, how do you measure economic progress? How do you tell if the economy is robust or sick?" Then we wait for them to give some pat answer about rising GDP. And that will be the decisive

moment. We will have given our leaders a simple pop quiz and they will have flunked. This escalating war of nerves with the heads of state is the top jaw of our strategic pincer. The bottom jaw of the pincer is the work that goes on at a grassroots level, where neoclassical dogma is still being propagated every day. Within university economics departments worldwide, a wholesale mindshift is about to take place. The tenured professors who run those departments, the keepers of the neoclassical flame, are as proud and stubborn as high-alpine goats, and they don't take well to being challenged. But challenge them we must, fiercely and with the conviction that we are right and they are wrong. At critical times throughout history, university students have sparked massive protests, called their leaders on their lies and steered their nations in brave new directions. It happened on campuses around the world in the 1960s, and more recently in Korea, China and Indonesia. Now we have reached another critical historical moment. Are the students up to it? Can they chase the old goats out of power? Will they be able to catalyze a paradigm shift in the science of economics and jam the doomsday machine?

A CORPORATION HAS NO SOUL, no morals. It cannot feel love or pain or remorse. You cannot argue with it. A corporation is nothing but a process — an efficient way of generating revenue. We demonize corporations for their unwavering pursuit of growth, power and wealth. Yet let's face it: they are simply carrying out genetic orders. This is exactly what corporations were designed — by us — to do. Trying to rehabilitate a corporation, urging it to behave responsibly, is a fool's game. The only way to change the behavior of a corporation is to recode it; rewrite its charter; reprogram it. In 1886, the U.S. Supreme Court brought down a decision that changed the course of American history. In *Santa Clara County vs. Southern Pacific Railroad*, a dispute over a railbed route, the judge ruled that a private corporation was a "natural person" under the U.S. constitution and therefore entitled to protection under the Bill of Rights. The judgment was one of the great legal blunders of the century. Sixty years after it was inked, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas said of Santa Clara that it "could not be supported by history, logic or reason." With Santa Clara, we granted corporations "personhood" and the same rights and privileges as private citizens. But given their vast financial resources, corporations now had far more rights and powers than any private citizen. In a single legal stroke, the whole intent of the Constitution — that all citizens have one vote and exercise an equal voice in public debates — had been undermined. In 1886, we, the people, lost control of our affairs and sowed the seeds of the Corporate State we now live in. There is only one way to regain control. We must challenge the corporate "I" in

the courts, and ultimately reverse Santa Clara. It will be a long and vicious battle for the soul of America. Will the people or the corporations prevail? In the next century, will we live and work on Planet Earth or Planet Inc.? The critical task will be for each of us to re-learn how to think and act as a sovereign citizen. Let's start by doing something so bold it chills the spine of corporate America. Let's make an example of the biggest corporate criminal in the world. Let's take on Philip Morris Inc., getting the truth out, applying pressure and never letting up until the State of New York revokes the company's charter.

THIS IS HOW THE REVOLUTION BEGINS: a few people start breaking their old patterns, embracing what they love (and in the process discovering what they hate), daydreaming, questioning, rebelling. What happens naturally then, according to the Situationists, is a groundswell of support for this new way of being, with more and more people empowered to perform new gestures "unencumbered by history." The new generation, Guy Debord believed, "would leave nothing to chance." These words still haunt us. The "society of spectacle" the Situationists railed against has triumphed. The American dream has devolved into exactly the kind of vacant obliviousness they talked about: a "have-a-nice-day" kind of happiness that close examination tends to disturb. If you keep up appearances, keep yourself diverted with new acquisitions and constant entertainments, keep yourself pharmacologized and recoil the moment you feel real life seeping in between the cracks, you'll be all right.

Some dream.

If the old America was about prosperity, maybe the new America will be about spontaneity. The Situationists maintained that ordinary people have all the tools they need for revolution. The only thing missing is a perceptual shift — a tantalizing glimpse of a new way of being — that suddenly brings everything into focus.



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AN INTERVIEW WITH *ADBUSTER*'S EDITOR KALLE LASN

Kalle Lasn is the editor of *Adbusters* magazine which is published by Adbusters Media Foundation, a global network of educators, artists, writers, students and entrepreneurs who want to launch the new social activist movement of our information age. Their goal is to use guerilla media tactics to catalyze resistance against those who would destroy the environment, pollute our minds, and diminish our lives.

Emigre: I just heard you on KGO talk radio here in San Francisco, and again in the evening *Adbusters* and the Buy Nothing Day were mentioned on the Nightly Business Report on public television. I was pleasantly surprised how everybody seemed to be quite sympathetic toward the idea of Buy Nothing Day.

Kalle Lasn: There's too much sympathy now. We can't get enough sparks flying on that campaign anymore. I'm getting a little jaded on it now that it's so successful.

You mean it's more successful at getting press than getting people to actually stop buying?

The purpose of the campaign isn't really to stop people buying; it's to get a debate going. As such, it's been quite successful. Sustainable consumption is the one meme that we have successfully floated, and not just in North America but in 15 countries around the world. Now, around Buy Nothing Day, there's lots of talk about sustainable consumption and debate with the corporate, chamber of commerce types on one side and environmental activists on the other. It's a very healthy debate, but we have to take it one step further now. It's time to move on and raise the ante.

Was Buy Nothing Day started by the Media Foundation?

Yes. It was launched in 1992, and it was actually the brainchild of Ted Dave, a young Vancouver artist who came up with those three magic words "Buy Nothing Day." We wanted to launch a campaign around the theme of sustainable consumption and when we heard those three magic words we grabbed them and ran with it.

What is the relationship between *Adbusters* magazine and The Media Foundation?

The Media Foundation is a non-profit society that runs on three legs. We publish *Adbusters*, maintain a Culture Jammer's website on the Internet, and launch social marketing campaigns through our advocacy advertising agency called PowerShift.

How many people are actively involved with the Media Foundation?

We're a core group of half a dozen full-timers. Then we have 50 or 60 artists and writers around the world who freelance for us, and 10,000 subscribers who send in

ideas and participate in our campaigns. Then there's another 100,000 people who read *Adbusters*, plus a few million people every year who catch our uncommercials on TV. We are a small core but we have a large impact.

How is *Adbusters* financed?

With a circulation of 40,000, *Adbusters* is almost sustainable now. When we hit 50,000 we will be self-sufficient. We supplement our income by selling a calendar and ad-parody postcards. We create tv and print campaigns for Greenpeace and other activist groups. Sometimes we sell the rights for someone to use one of our 30 second spots in their documentary and make some money that way. We juggle things around and make enough money to keep going.

You don't have any wealthy patrons or subsidies from the Canadian government?

Occasionally someone donates a few thousand dollars towards one of our campaigns. Sometimes we participate in a training program where we can hire somebody for six months and train them to become a copy editor or layout artist, and then for a few months the trainee's salary is paid for by the Canadian government.

Is there any significance to the fact that *Adbusters* is a Canadian magazine?

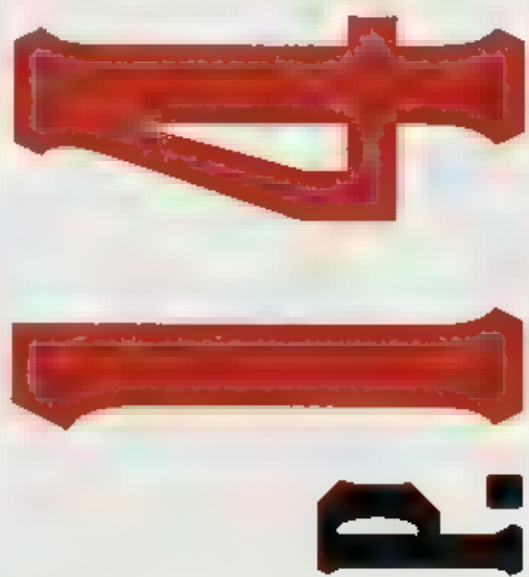
I think so. By and large, Americans are blind to what's happening in the rest of the world. They are stewing in their own juices, living out their own consumer culture fantasies. In the past, California was the birthplace of many new trends, but now I think the West coast of Canada is a more fertile ground for the sort of movement building work we are doing.

Why is that?

I sit here in Vancouver and the Orient is across the Pacific ocean on one side of me, and the American elephant sits right below me, and for some reason even Europe doesn't feel all that that far away. So in some sense I feel I am the surveyor of the whole global culture. I look around and understand the world in a more balanced and intimate way than many Europeans and definitely more intimately than most Americans and Orientals.

So you don't see any like-minded people or organizations or publications elsewhere? You think everybody has pretty much thrown in the towel except in Vancouver?

No I don't mean it that way. What I'm saying is that Canada right now is fertile ground for launching new trends and movements like the culture jamming movement we started here 10 years ago. I'm not saying we are unique, or that our disgust for corporate cool is not hap-



pening elsewhere. We are just 25 million people with no pretensions to be world leaders in anything. We survey the global scene from our unique vantage point, shake our heads and wonder what to do next. It's an exciting place to be.

The risk of an "alternative" publication such as *Adbusters* is that it will appeal primarily to the converted. How do you go about creating change when the people who strongly disagree with your ideas would most likely not pick up your magazine?

First, we never call ourselves "alternative." To me, "alternative" is a terrible word that denotes defeat. As soon as you call yourself alternative, you place yourself on the fringe. We see ourselves as launching the next global culture, the next big wave that's going to wash over the world. Second, I don't believe we need a big, 500,000 circulation magazine to launch this cultural movement. If you look back at some of the other movements that have worked in the past, such as the Situationist International 30 years ago, they published a little magazine called the *Internationale Situationiste* and they came out with only a dozen issues with a circulation of perhaps two or three thousand, and yet their influence has been tremendous. But ultimately what did the Situationists accomplish? You said yourself, when you look at America, you feel that everyone is way past this turning back point living out their consumer dreams.

I didn't say that they are beyond the turning back point. Yes, I think the people of the First World have become consumer drones. They have lost their authenticity and spontaneity in the spectacle and they are not fully alive anymore. But it's still possible to rouse them to revolution. And the more jaded and sick and caught in the malaise that people feel, the more ripe the moment becomes for revolution—and that's what I'm fighting for. And I know that it will happen, because it's not possible to repress human spontaneity and authenticity and aliveness to the point that we have in the First World without there being an incredible backlash.

How do you see it play itself out? Will it be a violent revolution, or a more quiet one where people will come to figure out that this is not the way we are supposed to live and simply change their ways?

Revolutions have always had the full spectrum, from a violent fringe to the quiet intellectuals, and everything in between. The next revolution will be the same. There will be very violent people smashing up tv stations, but also some who just want to meditate somewhere on the bank of a river.

So you don't believe, as Tibor Kalman suggested in your recent issue, that it is perhaps only those who reach a certain level of comfort and independence in life who have the ability to make choices, and who can ultimately make a real difference?

I don't agree with that at all. In my study of the way revo-

lutions were born in the past, it has been all kinds of people who have become enraged and sparked the revolt: rich intellectuals who dream up manifestoes right down to workers who just can't take it anymore and go mad. The coming revolution will be no different. All kinds of unlikely people will suddenly come out of the woodwork and join.

Let's talk about the other side, the side that will cause this revolution, the corporations that you often focus on in your magazine. What is ultimately so reprehensible about the way large corporations (the ones you often target) do business? Is it the actual products that they create and how they produce them, or is it the aggressive way they market and push those products into our lives?

It's much, much, much more than the way you put it. Corporations today are literally controlling people's minds. It may sound a bit over the edge, but that's the way I and more and more people are feeling these days. I turn on my television, or read a newspaper owned by Conrad Black or Time Warner, or I listen to the music on my radio and I can feel that our whole culture is being spoon-fed to us, top down, by corporations. Their image factory, their cool machine is spoon-feeding us our whole way of life. Some people might say that it's somewhat arrogant to think that consumers don't realize this. Some people will say they are completely aware of what corporations are doing and they don't mind it. They can look at these commercials and these products and pick and choose and take what they want from them or ignore them.

I think that the corporate cool machine, the 500-billion dollar a year global advertising industry, is conducting the biggest psychological experiment ever carried out on the human race, and that most of the affluent people of the First World have been brainwashed. If that's being arrogant, so be it. That's the way I see it.

Does *Adbusters* ever focus on corporations that have made a positive impact on our society?

I have no intention of reporting on a few good corporations at this particular time in human history, when corporations are literally colonizing our imaginations and creating a Planet Inc. I'm not interested at this stage of my life in pointing out that perhaps 1% of the corporations are actually good guys.

In your most recent issue you published the "First Things First" manifesto, written by a group of graphic designers in 1964. This manifesto has been criticized for being too soft, because it states "We don't advocate the abolition of high pressure consumer advertising; This is not feasible." Some people have criticized the manifesto for retreating, making the manifesto less compelling.

I find the "First Things First" manifesto fascinating because it was written thirty years ago. I don't agree with everything it says, but I think it was amazing that thirty years ago some people were already thinking the way I think now.

And they probably thought it could never get any worse. That's the scary part! It's the same with the Situationists. They thought it may get a little worse, but even in their wildest dreams they could never have imagined the kind of media spectacle and corporate rule we have now. But the "First Things First" manifesto is a fascinating historical curiosity that tells me that the roots of our culture jamming movement go back two generations.

On the other hand, it is sad to see how little impact it had. I believe it was reprinted two or three times after it was first published, and I'm not sure how many designers are aware of it, but the list of signatories was never expanded beyond the 22 original signatories. There's never been any push towards having it signed by more people.

We have a plan to circulate a revised "First Things First" manifesto, ask some highly respected designers like Tibor Kalman to sign, and then have it circulating in design schools around the world. Perhaps we can get a core group of a few dozen well known designers together and give talks at design schools. It's time to give students a new perspective on what they are doing.

In terms of the goals that *Adbusters* promotes, what kind of realistic action could graphic designers take that would be helpful to the general cause? It's tough for designers to turn down the Nike or Microsoft accounts. That's what they're being primed for in school. The knee-jerk reaction is usually: "I have a family to support, hospital bills to pay, mortgages, school loans to repay, etc." There are always many excuses.

I know. There's a long history of excuses. I felt that very strongly when I gave a talk recently at an AIGA conference in New York. Everybody there knew which side their bread was buttered on. I remember, near the end of my talk, inviting them to "Come on over to the other side." When I said that, people clapped and hooted, and yet at the same time, I could feel that very few of them actually would do anything of the kind.

What does it encompass to "come over to your side" for a graphic designer?

It means to stop selling your creativity exclusively to corporations and start using it to promote some really wholesome ideas that mean something for our future. In other words, to move from product marketing to social marketing, from selling products to selling ideas. Of course, I understand that very few of us can make that move 100%, but many of us can certainly dedicate 10 or 20% or some portion of our creativity to environmental and cultural causes.

But when that happens, doesn't that 10% represent an insignificant portion that's going to make the designer feel good, which is probably the main reason they do it, but generates little real change?

You're being a bit cynical here. Many of us are working all the time on social marketing cultural jamming projects

and the level of excitement and commitment and the joy and fun that we have in creating Buy Nothing Day posters and TV Turnoff Week tv ads is just incredible. And for many of the people who help us, who work during the day in the advertising agencies, it's a sideline for them, but it's giving their creative life a real boost. And if we can communicate some of that excitement of working on something that actually means something beyond just marketing another product, if we can communicate that to the next generation of designers, then I think the whole industry will heave. The cutting edge of design and advertising in the '90s and beyond is selling ideas, not products. Once the teachers and students in the design schools realize that, then they will change the world. That's how revolutions begin. They begin with a spark.

Let's shift gears here for a second. Recently there has been quite a bit of controversy regarding large corporate advertisers wanting editorial say, particularly when it comes to the positioning of their ads in magazines. When you publish a magazine, do you think it is fair to expect your advertisers to be completely hands-off and not meddle or demand anything in return, even though they pay all the bills?

If you are *Cosmopolitan* or *Vogue* or *Details*, then of course you have no choice but to deal with advertisers as the biggest stakeholder in your magazine. But lately I don't even think of these as real magazines anymore. They are bastard entities, vehicles for pushing consumerism as a way of life. They have completely sold out to advertisers who pay them ten, twenty, sometimes a hundred thousand dollars for their back covers.

So you feel no sympathy towards *Esquire* when their biggest advertisers tell them they will pull their ads when they run certain articles?

To me this is a totally boring phenomenon. It's like asking me if rich people have the right to complain when they can't afford a third car, and whether that's a problem for them. To me, it's the most boring thing to talk about these magazines that pretty well sold out years ago. Even though this debate was presented as a freedom of speech issue?

Their freedom of speech was lost a long time ago. They don't have any freedom of speech. There are still a few magazines like *Harper's* that haven't completely sold out, that still have a little bit of freedom and integrity left, but they are a tiny minority. The big job ahead is to change the very nature of what a magazine is. In that way, *Adbusters* is trying to be a role model for the magazine of the future by dealing with the critical issues of our time and trying to do it without selling out to advertisers.

What are some of the more hopeful signs that you see around you in terms of the goals that you aspire to?

I see a potent new wave of activism welling up. For example, over the last couple of years there has been the birth

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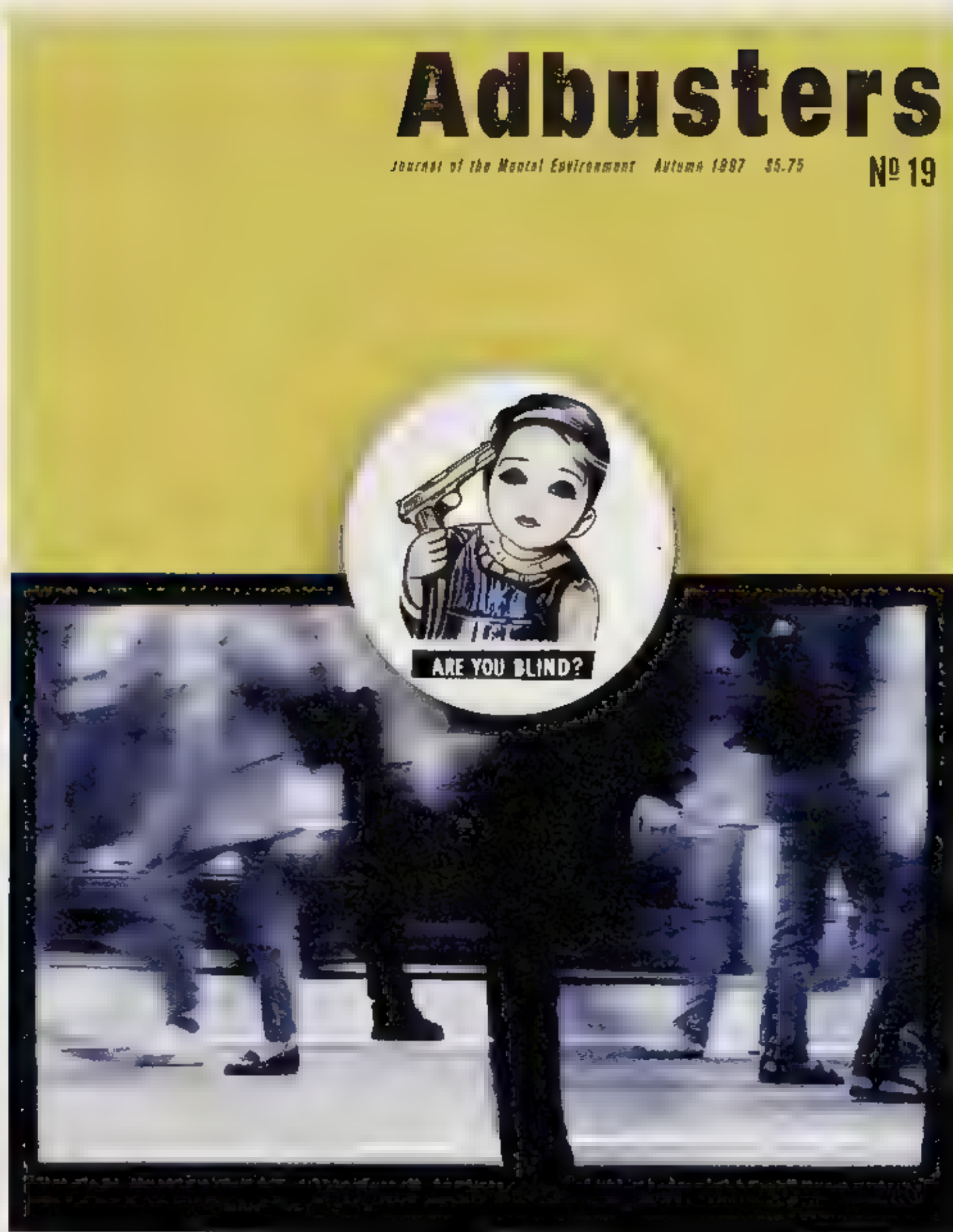
of a movement to revoke the charters of some of the worst corporate criminals in the world, like Philip Morris. This is not a big movement yet, but my point is that activists are thinking about corporations differently now. They are no longer looking, one-by-one, at the harm that corporations do, and then pleading with them, "Please don't advertise cigarettes to my kids; please don't use anorexic models to sell your jeans," and then maybe launching a boycott or challenging the corporation in court. The new activist, the activist of the future, is saying "This corporation is not the boss. I am the boss! If this corporation is engaged in serious, persistent criminal activity, then I'm going to put that corporation out of business. I'm going to fight to have its corporate charter revoked." This kind of bold new way of thinking by activists I find very energizing. I am also inspired by the success of campaigns like Buy Nothing Day — the idea that one social marketing campaign can, for the first time in the history of capitalism, turn consumption itself into a controversial issue.

One last question. When I asked you what can graphic designers do to perhaps change things for the better, you mentioned they can work on projects where they don't involve themselves with large corporations, but instead, work for smaller local organizations perhaps, and do something they can feel good about for organizations that can change the world for the better. But if you really want to change things, wouldn't it make more sense not to look for alternatives and parallel universes, but instead go right into the center of evil and work for Philip Morris or Microsoft and then try to change these corporations from within. Wouldn't that make a far larger difference?

There are many levels of working and all of them are pushing in the right direction. I like the graphic designer who goes to some small environmental group in his community and says "Listen, I have a special skill. If you need a poster or tv campaign, or if you need some branding advice, then I can give it to you." That's wonderful. Also, if a student who graduates from design school really believes in the need to create a different kind of future decides to join Nike and spend the next 20 years changing that company from within, I think that's valid too. But I think there are also deeper levels on which to operate. My hero, the student whom I really admire, is the one who says, "I'm going to live my life differently. I'm not buying into this bullshit that my role in life is to be a corporate tool, and that throughout my career these clients will come to me and I will always smile and serve them. Instead, I'm going to decide right now at the start of my career what I want and whom I'll serve." That's what I meant when I said, "Come on over to the other side." And those are the young designers, maybe only 5% of all the students, who will change the world. I am not a designer myself but I've worked with half a dozen art directors in

the last ten years and with many designers who have come into my office and helped on various aspects of our magazine and campaigns. I find them to be a special breed of people with a special kind of brain. They are far more open-minded than people in other professions. They are beyond rational. Most other creative people, like journalists for example, are always thinking plus or minus, good or bad, black or white, good or evil, but graphic designers seem to operate on a level beyond that. They are visually oriented. They live in the right cortex. And that gives them a special power. If they can learn to use that power in different ways, then designers can play a very important part in creating this new future that we so desperately need.





Cover Adbusters No. 19
Art direction and design by Chris Dixon
Photograph by Mackenzie Stroh
Illustration by S. Gafos

Cover Adbusters No. 20
Art direction and design by Chris Dixon
Illustration by Nick Rust

Cover Adbusters No. 23
Art direction and design by Chris Dixon
Photograph by Chen-Chi Chang, Magnum



AN INTERVIEW WITH *ADBUSTER'S* ART DIRECTOR CHRIS DIXON

Emigre: Did you seek out this job at *Adbusters*? Or was it something that happened by accident? And is this your full-time job, or is it a labor of love project you do in the weekends and off hours?

Chris Dixon: This job sought me out. An old professor of mine from design school contacted me about art directing *Adbusters* because I was involved in design projects that had social or political content and he knew I would be interested. I never really expected to work in a product/consumer driven graphic design studio because of the way I got into the field. I started my design degree after already completing a psychology degree and working as a social worker for three years. With that background, combined with a passion for the craft of design and communicating, I knew I needed to be involved in projects that were contributing in a meaningful way. While doing my design degree, I was fortunate to have professors who encouraged us to take on social and political content and these ideals stuck with me. Before working for *Adbusters*, I did projects for Amnesty International, The World Health Organization, and some literary journals. This is now my full-time job, which ends up being weekends and off hours as well. I design and art-direct the magazine, as well as doing all the design and communication work for the Media Foundation. This includes posters and literature for all the campaigns, work on the television spots, speaking and presentations, and working with students at the Emily Carr Design Institute here in Vancouver. We have a good relationship with the Institute; students work on projects with us and we have interns and work study students who spend semesters here.

In terms of the goals that *Adbusters* promotes, what kind of realistic action could graphic designers take that would be helpful to the general cause?

There is no end to the work that designers could be doing. We go on and on about being problem-solvers, but what are these problems we're solving? If you want problems, we have Americans each producing three to four pounds of garbage a day, we have North America spewing out a third of the world's toxic waste, we have 8,000 people dying from smoking each day, and what is the design community doing? It is giving out awards to the people who redesigned the Pam cooking spray can because it communicates an "engaging, healthy look." Are we part of the problem or part of the solution? I think that designers can contribute in a number of positive ways. You can shape what you feel is an ethical career, taking on clients who are contributing positively to society and culture; search

out social minded organizations and offer your invaluable communication skills to promote their message; or, more specific to the goals of *Adbusters*, you can create your own content. Be proactive rather than reactive, stir things up a bit. Take on an issue that you feel passionate about and make a poster, make a 30 second TV spot, make a double-page spread and try to get it into a magazine. If good design can make people switch dish soap, then it can definitely make an impact in more meaningful areas of our lives.

How aware are you, or how much do you concern yourself, with the look and feel of other magazines when you design *Adbusters*?

Adbusters comments on trends and advertising in pop culture, so I have to be aware of what's going on in the magazine world. But from a design point-of-view, no matter how stylish a piece of magazine design is, if the message underneath is garbage I just can't be inspired. A magazine like *Details* is nice to flip through, but the content is so formulaic I lose interest. I am more inspired by films and books, because in magazines the overwhelming presence of advertising breaks any conceptual flows that may occur. In editorial design, the work of Fred Woodward, Tibor Kalman and D.J. Stout, has all been influential. I tend to be drawn to design that is idea-driven and organic, a human touch, some hand-done type, a certain grittiness. In terms of cover design, I've always admired the clear, concept-driven work from the 60s, such as George Lois's covers for *Esquire*, and also Dugald Stermer's for *Ramparts*. They inspired me to work at presenting one strong concept without any clutter. Our distributor was not happy about the loss of cover lines, but the newsstand sales jumped 20% since I introduced that style, so people seem to respond to this simple, clean approach. In terms of illustrators, I am very aware of who's currently working in magazines because I think they contribute a lot to the overall look and feel. I am fortunate to have some great illustrators doing work for me. Henrik Drescher, Gary Baseman, Amy Guip and Jordin Isip have all either contributed or will do so in upcoming issues. And they are doing work for next to nothing because we don't have much of a budget. This is another challenge of my job, finding people and agencies to contribute their skills and talent for a 10th of what they normally make.

The most recent issue, "Blueprint for a Revolution," seems very strong in terms of how it blends the editorial with the images, photo essay, and alternative ads. The design

really enhances the overall theme. How does an issue like that come about? Do you and Kalle work very closely together on such issues? Do you have a very specific idea to start with that you then simply develop?

Kalle and I worked very closely on that issue, more so than previous ones. It was an exciting collaboration. The process was very organic, more like putting together a documentary film than a magazine. We wanted to address the complex relationships between economics, media and the environment, and had to find a way to create continuity, as well as generate some passion in the readers. We ended up having the six blueprint pages pop up every 20 pages or so, and then worked the rest of the issue around those ideas, including the alternative ads. The revolution theme took on a life of its own, with the editorial feeding off of my images and design, and me feeding off the editorial content that was being developed. I think that a close collaboration between editorial and art brings out the best design work because everything is driven by the content. You don't just have the designer in a room pushing type around on the page trying to make it look cool. The designer is much more aware of what is really trying to be said. My position here is unique because Kalle and I develop each issue and I have the opportunity to contribute to the content and propose ideas. In the Blueprint issue I developed the section with the "First Things First" manifesto and the Tibor Kalman interview. These both question the role designers play in a consumer society and call for moral and ethical considerations in their work. As you know, this topic of social responsibility is both embraced and rejected by different schools of thought in design. We got a lot of feedback from designers and students about it and I want to keep that debate moving forward.

There is a certain starkness about the design of *Adbusters*: simple text boxes with ample margins, fairly straightforward use of headlines and pull-quotes, few typefaces, and usually separation of text and image, resulting in a very flatfooted delivery of the content. Was it a conscious decision to use this approach, or is that simply your preferred method of designing?

There are a number of reasons. The original idea was to remove all the clutter and aim for a strong concept-driven approach so that the ideas and writing could shine through. I think we were successful with that. I am slowly building up from this skeleton and adding more formal elements when it feels right. The next issue is actually somewhat denser in its design, because we are dealing with American decadence and that's reflected in the design. Also, I am alone in the art department, so a lot of my work ends up being finding the right photographs, organizing photo-shoots, or reading the cover stories. I spend more time experimenting with the resonance between two photographs when juxtaposed on a page

spread than on whether the margins should be .5" or .75" from the gutter. Certain priorities are set, and pushing pull-quotes around on the page or wondering whether to use Clarendon or Matrix does not end up being one of them. In the end, there may not be as many bells and whistles as in other magazines, but I tend to see most of that as decoration. I am all for formal experiments, and try to explore them when I can, but most of what's being done now has no context. It's like a painter doing a Jackson Pollock in 1996; they'd be laughed at. Lately, in many cases, there seems to be a return to simplicity, even in the pages of *Emigre*. Maybe the modernists were right. Were there any magazines that you used as a model for *Adbusters*?

In some ways it's modeled after a typical mainstream magazine because I wanted a look that would fit right in and not appear like a radical left-wing journal. That look preaches to a small audience. We are trying to challenge the mainstream and bring new ideas into it, but from within, not from the fringes. We like to call it "slick subversive." The look is presentable and palatable, but the underlying messages challenge many ideals that our culture is built on. People just don't respond to the heavy-handed, in-your-face style of social criticism anymore, especially young people. I am trying to make the magazine seductive and sophisticated. There are some urgent and important ideas that we want to communicate, and I want to present them in a fresh and appealing way. It's like the Trojan Horse, except we aren't planning on killing anyone.



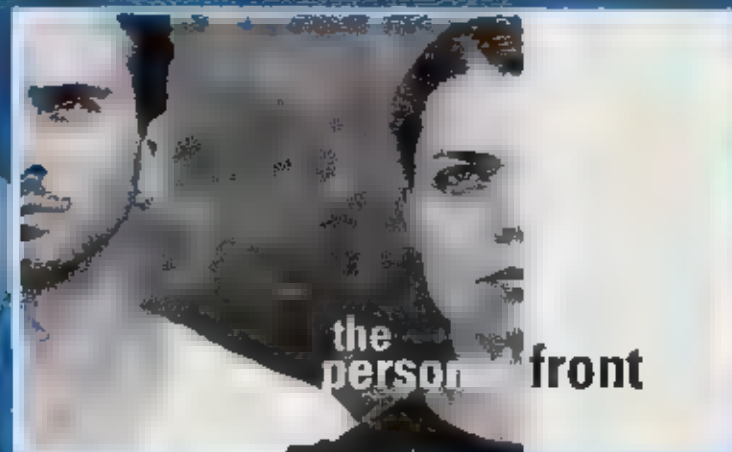
OPPOSITE PAGE

Page spreads, *Adbusters* No. 23

Art direction and design by Chris Dixon

Top: Photograph by Mackenzie Stroh

Bottom: Photographs by Tony Stone Images



Next time you're in a particularly soul-searching mood, ask yourself this simple question: What would it take for me to make a spontaneous, radical gesture in support of something I believe in? Do I believe in anything strongly enough? What would it take for me to say this may not be nice, it may not be considerate, it may not even be rational — but damn it, I'm going to do it anyway because it feels right?

Direct action is a proclamation of personal independence. It happens, for the first time, at the intersection of your self-consciousness and your tolerance for being screwed over. You act. You thrust yourself forward and intervene. And then you hang loose and do, wish whatever comes.

Once you start relating to the world as an empowered human being instead of a hapless consumer drone, something remarkable happens. Your cynicism dissolves. Your interior world is suddenly vivid. You're like my cat on the prowl: alive, alert, and still a little wild.

Guy Debord, the leader of the Situationist movement, said "Revolution is not showing life to people, but making them live." This desire to be free and unfettered is hard-wired into each

one of us. It's a drive almost as strong as sex or hunger, an irresistible force that, once harnessed, is almost impossible to stop.

With that irresistible force on our side, we will strike.

We will strike by smashing the postmodern hell of mirrors and redefining what it means to be alive. We will reframe the battle in the grandest terms. The old political battles that have consumed humankind during most of the 20th century — black vs. white, left vs. right, male vs. female — will fade into the background. The only battle still worth fighting and winning, the only one that can set us free, is The People vs. The Corporate Cool Machine.

END GAMES



People of the next century
will gaze back with ghastly awe
upon our time



EMIGRE

CHAPTER

3

MINNEAPOLIS

ACUTE

NO 49

22





MINNEAPOLIS ACUTE



"HEY, WHIPPLE, SQUEEZE THIS" A GUIDE TO CREATING GREAT ADS

Luke Sullivan
256 pp. Softcover
An Adweek Book, \$16.95

REVIEWED BY KEVIN FENTON

A PERSONAL ANECDOTE, to clarify my biases and acknowledge some debts: In the early 1980s, Minneapolis agencies created ads that were so powerful that they convinced me to change careers. At the time, I was a law student. I enjoyed law; I appreciated its rigors and acknowledged its value. But there was something grey and chilled about it that reinforced the grey and chill of a Minneapolis winter. I also didn't have a car, so I spent a lot of time walking the neighborhoods near the U.

I kept encountering these posters, taller and wider than a man, that filled one end of a bus stop. The headline below a photograph of Richard Nixon observed, "You can't cover up a bad haircut." An ad for an exhibition of American Abstract Art in the 30s announced, "After four years of Herbert Hoover, you'd reject reality, too." A photo of the wheelchair-bound President Roosevelt admonished, "Hire the handicapped. Your parents did."

It is now hard to recreate just how powerful these ads seemed because so much of what was fresh about them has been incorporated into formulas and appropriated by lesser talents. But at the time, there was something in these puns and Presidents that made me re-think how I wanted to spend my life. They were celebrations in a world of conflicts; they were straightforward in a world of nuance. And the people who created them seemed to be having fun. I had found what I wanted to do for a living. Although I completed my degree and passed the bar exam, I would never practice law. I

told people that I had gone through my midlife crisis at twenty-five to get it out of the way.

I didn't know it at the time, but the work that I was seeing in the bus stops of Minneapolis was having an impact across the country. In its 1984 Regional Design Annual, *Print* magazine declared that "It can be . . . flatly stated that the best print work being done anywhere is coming from an agency in Minneapolis — the phenomenal Fallon McElligott Rice." (The agency would become Fallon McElligott when Executive Art Director Nancy Rice left.) The other arbiters agreed. Minneapolis agencies in general — and Fallon McElligott in particular — began to dominate the *Communications Arts* and *One Show* collections. They were named Agency of the Year by *Advertising Age*. Even work from other cities showed the influence of Minneapolis. A Seattle agency promised prospective employees: "Do Minneapolis advertising without Minneapolis weather."

In his fine, immensely helpful book, *Hey Whipple, Squeeze This*, copywriter Luke Sullivan notes that the Minneapolis style didn't come out of nowhere. It had historical antecedents, deriving from Doyle Dane Bernbach, the agency that started the so-called Creative Revolution of the 60s with its ads for Volkswagen, Avis, and other clients.

Unfortunately, the creative agencies had fallen on hard times when the recession of the 70s scared clients and that fear led to the hegemony of focus groups and other means of enforcing mediocrity. Agencies overcame consumer indifference by spending so much on media that they were able to reach their customers through sheer bullying force. While this may have sold individual brands, it also further deepened buyers' cynicism about advertising as a whole. Companies were shamelessly — and righteously — strident. Sullivan writes: "It was as if the whole scenario came out of the 40s. In Fred Wakeman's 1946 novel, *The Hucksters*, this was how advertising worked. In the middle of a meeting, the client spat on the conference-room table and said; 'You have just seen me do a disgusting thing. Ugly word, spit. But you'll always remember what I just did.'" To top it off, much of the existing advertising was patronizing to the point of being infantile. Sullivan's title refers to a character in commercials for Charmin bathroom tissues — an officious grocer named "Mr. Whipple" who would glare over his glasses when he saw housewives squeezing the Charmin bathroom tissue but who, because it was

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so squeezably soft, couldn't resist squeezing it himself.

Sullivan hated this campaign so much when he was a kid that he used to point a finger gun at it whenever it came on. As time went on, he refined the pleasure he took in his contempt by firing his finger gun at the exact moment that Whipple himself squeezed the Charmin. Whipple was probably the most obnoxious of the commercials airing during the 70s but it wasn't the only one. Advertising had become something that annoyed consumers and embarrassed its creators. It had become, in effect, cultural pollution. The spirit of the best advertising of the 60s had been extinguished. In this context, Fallon McElligott, which opened its doors in 1981, was less a revolution than a revival. Like the best agencies that preceded it, Fallon aimed to create something different. They believed that "advertising didn't have to embarrass itself in order to make a cash register ring."

The theory of what might be called the Minneapolis School was probably best expressed in the ad that introduced Fallon McElligott to the world and that Sullivan quotes. That ad, which carried the headline, "A new agency for clients who would rather outsmart the competition than outspend them" sketched a world where the average consumer is inundated with hundreds of messages a day and where, at best, a handful of them break through. In some ways, this simply accepted the premises of the old strident agencies: the consumer is busy; the consumer is overwhelmed; the consumer is indifferent. But the prescription was different. Rather than annoying their way into viewers' minds, they would charm and engage.

DID THEY SUCCEED? Yes and no. There was a great deal of criticism of the "yeah, they win awards but we move product" variety, but the only problem was that such critics—who purportedly lived and died by hard cold numbers—often had their facts wrong. Fallon McElligott's work for clients such as Gold'n Plump chickens, Minnesota Federal Bank, and *Rolling Stone* achieved unprecedented results. Sullivan quotes *Rolling Stone* publisher Jann Wenner as saying, "It was like someone came in with a wheelbarrow of money and dumped it on the floor."

More seriously, success soon hardened the work into a formula: poster-like layouts; archival photos; ironic headlines. The Creative Director at BBDO's Minneapolis office would label this style "Minneapolis Cute." It seemed as if this new Creative Revolution had simply made the world safe for one liners. The venerable designer Gene Federico complained in *Print* magazine that the look of the time (which he didn't specifically identify with Minneapolis) relied too much on stacked, centered headlines. In addition to breaking lines in arbitrary ways that interfered with their meaning, the dominance of headlines that loomed like big raised fists

dissolved client identities. Put your thumb over the logo and you couldn't tell whose ad was whose.

An approach to advertising that put so much emphasis on getting noticed generated other problems. In their zeal to stand out, ads were often—in the words of a lawyer and potential client—"amazingly insensitive to the way in which they were perceived." One award-winning piece took, as its starting point, the classic photograph of one Vietnamese man holding a gun to the head of another. The victim is wincing. He knows—and we know—that in seconds his brains will fragment and his life will end. It was one of the most horrible images of one of the most horrible moments in our history. But—to sell the services of a photo retoucher—the creative team doctored the photo so that the pistol was replaced with a hair dryer. It was an artful—and awful—mutation of spitting on the table.

It should be noted, however, that such work is easier to condemn in retrospect. I have, in fact, proposed—and praised—ads which I later realized were offensive. When Fallon created an ad for WFLD TV's reruns of "Dynasty" with the headline, "Bitch, Bitch, Bitch" over head shots of the three female leads, I howled. When they coupled a photograph of the burning, disintegrating Hindenburg with the headline "Just a reminder that your balloon mortgage is coming due," I laughed. Only later did I find out that the former ad offended feminists and that the latter one outraged the relatives of those who died in the Hindenburg crash. I am shocked by how many times I have exclaimed, "Boy, if only the clients had the guts to run this." Anyone who has ever tried seriously to create advertising knows the pleasures of iconoclasm. And, from a practical standpoint, there always is a fine line between the most engaging ads and the most offensive ones. It is, however, time that we stop applauding ourselves for being offensive, for being ignorant of history and insensitive to humanity, for imagining that our little frat boy pranks are triumphs of the human spirit.

Because it is so keenly aware of the overwhelmed consumer, Minneapolis advertising also tends to over-stress simplicity. Sullivan writes, "If you take away one thing from this book, let it be the advice in this section. Simple is almost *always* better." Section headings which follow include "Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity!" "Simple is hard to miss," "Simple is bigger," "Simple is more believable," "Simple breaks through advertising clutter," "Simple is easier to remember," and "Billboards force you to be simple." He writes that "Every element you add to a layout reduces the importance of all other elements." He quotes Michelangelo, Van Gogh, and Robert Louis Stevenson to the effect that editing is the only true artistic act.

The problem with this advice is not that it is incor-



rect but that it is incomplete. It is easy to understand why he does it, especially when you encounter ads that founder beneath the irrelevant, the banal, and the lazy. But it is also interesting to note that Sullivan goes on at length about brevity. He talks simplicity but he doesn't quite walk it. Consider the cover of *Hey Whipple, Squeeze This*, which contains four elements. A photograph of a man in a grocer's coat and tie holding a roll of toilet paper occupies the top two-thirds of the page. The words "Hey, Whipple, Squeeze This" shout from the toilet paper's shrink wrap. Below this, is the subtitle "A Guide To Creating Great Ads," the author's name, and an imprimatur that announces "an Adweek book."

The *Hey, Whipple* cover embodies a tension that is insufficiently recognized; simplicity engages but information convinces. When ads cannot be stripped down to a simple poster-like image, the problem may not be that the creative team didn't work hard enough. The reality may be that information is necessary to the sale. In this case, the book title is brilliant and engaging – and it, along with the author's reputation, sold me before I had even seen the cover. But the subtitle clarifies that this is, in its heart, a how-to book; the author's name provides valuable information to those of us who are familiar with Sullivan's wonderful work; and the *Adweek* bug provides a credibility to those trying to select among the many how-to books in this uncredentialed business. The cover contained multiple elements because it needed multiple elements. Simplicity is a tactic, not a goal; a way of highlighting information, not erasing it. If simplicity were everything, the award shows would be filled with blank pages.

Despite its occasional lapses – into formula, into offensiveness, into excessive simplicity – the Minneapolis approach has produced thousands of ads that serve the client, charm the consumer, and honor the profession. As the people who created it matured, it was inspiring to watch them refresh the old styles and extend the old limits. As the 90s end, these particular revolutionaries may be finding that revolutions are harder to maintain than to incite. They may find that repetition, in and of itself, attenuates creative work. Sullivan applauds The Energizer Bunny as an example of the kind of work he admires. But when I mentioned to a friend that the book attacked those campaigns that grated through sheer repetition, he said, "Yeah, like the Energizer Bunny." The whole idea of Big Ideas may also warrant some reconsideration. I tend to prefer campaigns – such as those for Saturn cars or IBM e-business – which consist of many smart, small ideas linked by a consistent strategy and tone.

And the admirable social concern expressed in this book – that advertising not become cultural pollution – may need updating. As Sullivan acknowledges, the con-

sumer is now literally armed against the Whipples of the world. One click of the remote, and he vaporizes. If advertising's sin in the 70s was that it was too strident, its sin in the 90s is that it is too subtle. Between product placement and public relations, it is getting harder and harder to tell where marketing ends and life begins.

AS ANYONE IN THE BUSINESS will tell you, advertising does not simply grow out of an approach of advertising. It also grows out of a particular interaction with particular people.

To return to *Hey, Whipple* itself: The final cover design of Sullivan's book (which was not technically an ad but serves many of the same purposes) may not have been Sullivan's. It may have been made by a committee or influenced by a publisher. Because they are collaborative, because they involve multiple people with multiple agendas, the decisions that shape advertising are always potentially adversarial. And that potential too frequently becomes real.

The industry's language underscores this tension. Agencies routinely refer to the facts that support their recommendations as "ammo." In celebrating the Volkswagen ads created by Doyle Dane Bernbach, Sullivan – who generally knows better – writes "The first shots of the Creative revolution had been fired." Lamenting the dominance of the more numbing forms of research, he writes, "The wolf was at the door again. Wearing a suit." The logical inference from all this talk of guns and ammo and predators is that someone intends to harm someone.

This attitude is especially true of the young but it permeates the entire business, and it leaks into the language of *Hey, Whipple*. Sullivan quotes the English advertising executive John Ward: "Advertising is a craft executed by people who aspire to be artists, but [is] assessed by those who aspire to be scientists. I cannot imagine any human relationship more perfectly designed to produce total mayhem."

The problem, of course, is that advertising is neither an art nor a science, and I don't think the profession will advance at all until everyone is taken down a notch. The purpose of art is to expand and intensify our understanding of what it means to be a human being; the purpose of advertising is to sell Fritos. Most of the time, Sullivan acknowledges this. For example, he paints a portrait of a "prima donna" that is so lifelike that it practically rises from the page and burps: "[The Prima Donna] had that one dead giveaway, something that all PDs share – the Swagger. That walk that people get when they think their DNA is better than everybody else's. Oops, there he goes now, down the hallway. And in his hand, a paper bearing his latest brilliant headline.

Where they develop a Swagger, I don't know. I mean, if that paper was a blueprint for world peace instead of a

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coupon ad for Jell-O, okay, sashay a little bit." But there are also enough mentions of berets and troubled artists to reinforce stereotypes, justify bad habits ("They don't really need boring information, they're creative"), and prompt silly research ("The creative people like it but they're, well, insane"). To be fair, Sullivan raises these stereotypes in order to chasten creatives who want to indulge themselves, but it seems wiser to not even acknowledge them. In my experience, the best creative people are more like engineers than artists. (Actually, the best artists are more like engineers than most people think.) They absorb vast quantities of information; they are obsessed with efficiency and flow; they revise, refine, and think about consequences; they want things to work.

Advertising is too shallow to be art, but, as *Hey, Whipple* convincingly argues, it is too chaotic, too stained with the human, to be a science. As my college Economics professor once said, "the problem with the social sciences is that you can't replay the Civil War fifty times with fifty different variables." As much as clients would like to predict the future, they can't. Sullivan correctly points out that the biggest waste of money in modern marketing - the introduction of New Coke in the early 80s - was completely justified by research. For all its trappings of sober due diligence, much research is glib to the point of being irresponsible. Although I haven't much worked on the kind of large consumer accounts that demand formal focus groups, my efforts have been subject to enough informal research - routing throughout departments, presentation to committees - to understand the basic dynamic: People with little or nothing invested in the fate of the work are asked to make comments. Such a process is not useless. At its best, it can crystallize some unarticulated suspicions that you already have about the work in question; it can also puncture the cocoon of delusional enthusiasm that sometimes surrounds work created by a small, closed group of people. But such testing tends to harvest the kind of unconsidered prejudices that float at the top of our minds; it tends to apply old, general rules to new, particular work, because that's easier than discovering the particular rules embodied in the new work; it encourages negative comments, because they seem more helpful than "yeah, I love it"; it encourages narrow tactical comments that have unintended consequences. It also falsifies the basic fact at the heart of advertising, consumer indifference. Participants are placed in a room without distractions, given donuts and coffee, and directed to a single set of ads that they are invited to consider at length. (In a sense, the much-maligned award shows could be profitably viewed as a more useful form of research. The judging process more accurately portrays the actual experience of encountering ads, which

is of being overwhelmed and distracted but eventually dropping a coin into a cup.) People in focus groups are in a weird middle place. They are neither consumers - who are not asked what they think of ads, and who see them for only a brief time - nor creatives - who spend hours creating them and thinking through their consequences.

It is time for advertising to admit that it is neither an art nor a science. But it is also time for advertising to assert that it is a craft. While I am well aware of the dangers of overly academic professional training, maybe it would help if universities started to offer graduate concentrations in advertising that acknowledged that the profession is a confluence of three disciplines - design, writing, and marketing. We may, as a result, get creativity that is less sophomoric and direction that is less philistine. Such programs would help us agree on some basic principles, including the paramount principle of client service (or what lawyers call "the duty of zealous representation.") Maybe it is time to trade in a lot of local and marginal award shows for a few textbooks that explore a few great campaigns in depth. Maybe it is time for advertising to become a profession. Luke Sullivan's book would be a cornerstone of any such curriculum.



After a dozen years in various agencies, Kevin Fenton now works as a freelance advertising writer. In addition to contributing to *Emigre*, he has published essays in *Eye*, *Beloit Magazine*, and the *Minneapolis StarTribune*. The essay "The New Typographer Muttering In Your Ear" has been anthologized in *Looking Closer 2: Critical Essays on Graphic Design*.

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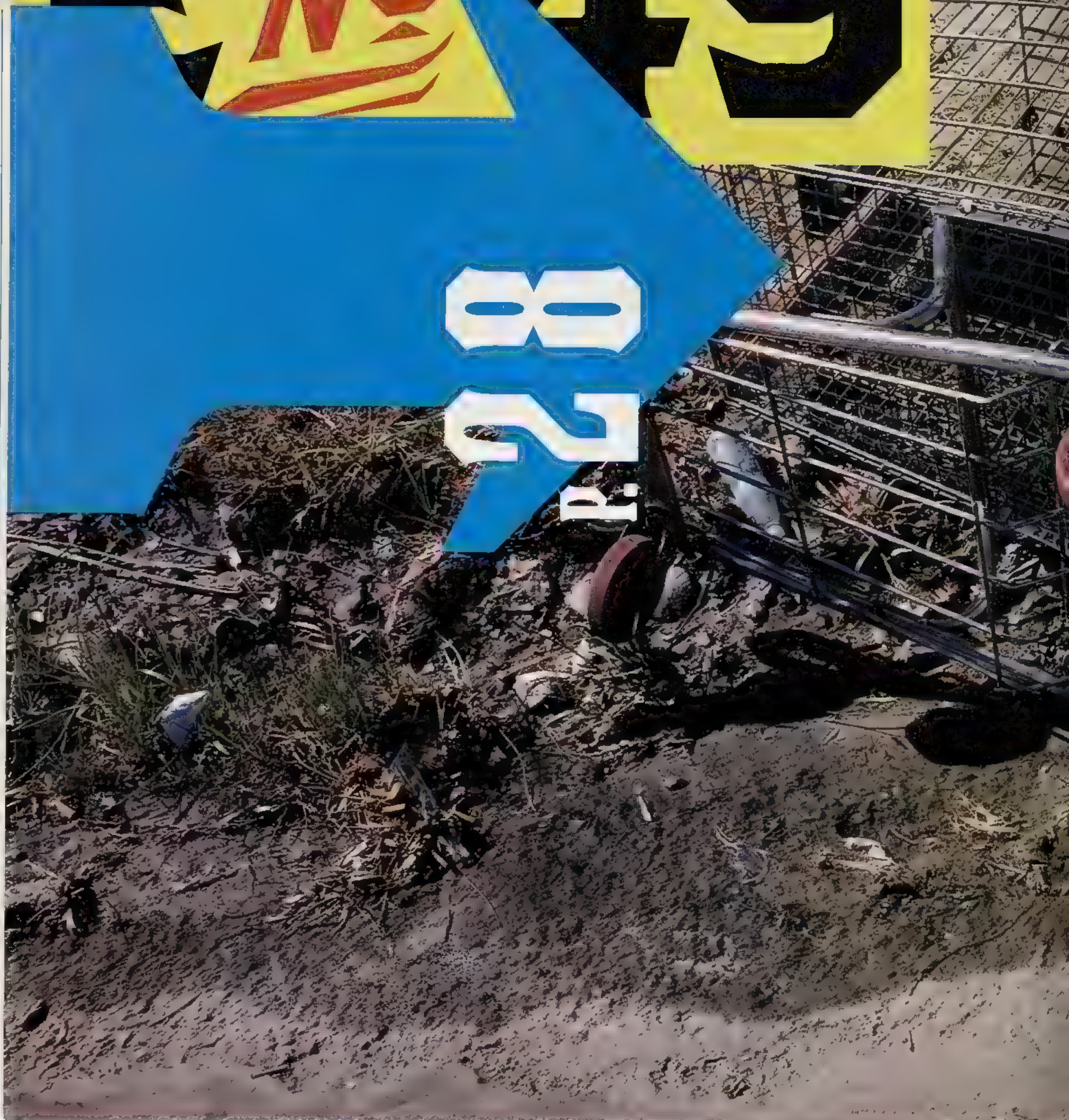
CHAPTER

4

LICENSED TO SELL

NO 49

82





LICENSED TO SELL

CARRIE MCLAREN

PRETTY MUCH THE ONLY pitchy chorus you'll hear from commercials these days is this one: the jingle is dead. Once a standby of tv and radio commercials, those mad-deniously catchy maxims are no more. Plop, plop, fizz, fizz? Been there, done that. Ads now aspire to loftier heights: making the music in commercials as entertaining as the stuff on cds. Just as advertisers have employed hep film directors (John Woo, the Coen brothers, Kevin Smith) to transform commercials visually, they're en-listing esteemed artists to liven up the audio.

Pop music and advertising have a long history together. But whereas a couple of decades ago jingles would occasionally work as pop music and vice versa (Coke's "I'd Like To Teach the World To Sing" broke the Top 10 in 1972; the Carpenters' "We've Only Just Begun" was originally a bank commercial), by the 80s, crossing over had, uh, crossed over.

Advertisers increasingly turned to licensing popular songs rather than crafting original tunes for commercials. Once Nike bought the rights to the Beatles' "Revolution," everything seemed up for grabs. Parliament, Staple Singers, "Disco Inferno": if it can be hummed — and even if it can't — it can be licensed.

"Audiences today are too intelligent and sophisticated for [jingles]," says Rick Lyon of Lyon Music, a company that makes ad music. People easily identify jingles as advertising and tune them out. Music in ads these days shouldn't dare sing the praises of the product, or even mention it.

But is "intelligent" the right word? Rationality wasn't behind the kick in the head I felt when, upon entering a local bagel place, I heard "Everyday People" on a radio and... thought of a car commercial. Not Sly Stone. Or discovering those records in college. Or even the predictability of hit radio. A *fucking* car commercial.

Consciousness, in other words, has little to do with it. People react intuitively, and commercials turn that into an advantage. Jingles aimed to elicit brand name recall, but ads now work by "borrowing interest" — transferring value from the music to the product. Commercials not only borrow interest from music, they borrow our interests, milking our memories and desires, and sell them back to us. And since licensed songs are of the culture, they work as a shorthand for consumer life styles, from rock-and-roll rebellion to sophisticated

jazz cool to obscure, weirdo noise.

Small wonder then that advertisers prefer licensed songs to original ones. They not only get "proven" hits, they get more to borrow: the image of the artist, the video, the movie — all synergized to copromote.

This upside can be a downside as well. The more well known a song or artist, the more convoluted the association, the more difficult to make a connection between the song and the brand stick. As Lyon points out, the Dragnet theme — once an ad for a tv show — is now in an MCI campaign. Last year it was in a Nissan campaign. And for a decade it's been licensed for "Tum-ta-tum tum-tums."

And then there's the possible fallout from appropriating the wrong song. Children of the 60s may feel politically wronged when the messages behind their "Revolution"s and Janis Joplins are co-opted. Or morally wronged: how could so-and-so sell out? But when I reacted to "Everyday People," it wasn't about selling out or some 60s multiculti love-in; it was as if the song in my head had been swiped.

Lyon acknowledges these concerns and admits to cringing when the Four Tops leader sings about Velveeta. "But why the double standard?" he asks. "Why is it just fine to parody a transcendent artwork like the Mona Lisa in scores of ads, but wrong to license 'Start Me Up'?"

For better or worse, "Start Me Up" punches more buttons; it's more culturally relevant. Whereas Mona Lisa is ancient high art (and now kitsch), the Stones song is contemporary and popular — it speaks to more people. And whereas only a hopelessly naive idealist would deign to protect all of Art from taint of commerce, we muster up the energy to scream when our personal experience is at stake. (They can take "Revolution" and William Burroughs and KRS-1 and the Verve, but Sly Stone? That's it. Next thing you know they'll be coming for my right arm.)

Unfortunately, we may not realize the loss until after the fact. The worst thing about hearing "Everyday People" in that car commercial was that it didn't bother me initially. Maybe I even enjoyed it. The same thing that disarms commercials' power — disengagement — ultimately lulls us back in. Acceptance, ironically, is the hummer side effect of cynicism.

"But, really, what is the difference between using Candice Bergen's Murphy Brown character in a commercial and Sly Stone's 'Everyday People'?" asks Lyon.

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"There is really no difference because Murphy Brown and 'Everyday People' are commodities with instant audience recognition."

Sure; like every song on commercial radio, "Everyday People" is there to sell something. The reason Murphy Brown plugging Sprint doesn't bother us is because we've never convinced ourselves she's there for any other reason. But considering that every last human desire, experience, and action gets commodified in one way or another, abandoning all commodities means throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The intersections between art and entertainment and commerce are loaded with fine lines and gray areas, but that hardly makes trying to distinguish them unnecessary. At any rate, there's a difference between simply selling music and using music to sell jeans.

When a song becomes too commodified, too overdetermined, what happens to the *music*? (And I'm not talking about some transcendental, life-affirming expression; just something to be listened to, period.) Songs are now plucked for commercials as soon as they break the charts; it's as if that's the whole point in the first place. The avant-garde of the moment, techno, made its way into commercials even before breaking the Top 10 — a phenomenon unheard of in the past. And Sherman Oaks, California, is now home to Ultra Lounge, reported to be the first ever "retail environment" based on a CD compilation series based on a life style movement based on a past decade.

A song makes its way into popular consciousness now equipped with an army of strategically linked agendas. A single tune may evoke images of genre, of the artist, of the video, of the decade or era, of the generation, the store where it was purchased, life style magazines, clothing line, video channels and media outlets, even its "degree of uncommercialness."

With so many brands competing for the same images, marketers like Lyon have hit upon a postlicensing strategy: to get the instant values communicated through a pop song but in a way unique to the commercial. A recent Gap campaign gives LL Cool J, Luscious Jackson, and other musicians 30 seconds to create "whatever they want," rather than performing known songs; Nike and Calvin Klein play A&R director, seeking out experimental ensembles such as Faust, Tortoise, and Flying Saucer Attack for the very traits that make them "uncommercial." When something as "out there" as Faust — unsellable in its own right — can be lucratively converted to a means to sell, everything really is up for grabs. We can no longer assume that any music, no matter how obscure, exists for its own sake.

As business primes every mainstream and alternative to the alternative to the alternative, and as the lead time between appearing in record stores and commer-

cials shrinks, music fans face a double bind: The one easy defense against all this crap — cynicism, emotional detachment — gets in the way of experiencing music in the first place. And cynicism is a slippery slope. To be cynical and detached enough, you'd need a hole drilled in your head.

So what now? I'm not sure, but until we figure something out, I'd like to suggest a moratorium on further uses of Parliament, Stereolab, and Hank Williams in commercials, in exchange for forfeiting the rights to all electronica. (Tricky, Spooky, Chemical Brothers: all yours!) Or maybe we should, as a friend of mine suggested, just start recording the fax machine and listening to that. With so many forces competing for our ears, we're only going to find music where it is least expected.



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THE CYMA BETWEEN L AND A

"WHAT IS THAT SQUIGGLE?"

If you have ever seen an old 20th century sign showing what appeared to be an unidentifiable piece of punctuation between letters, it was probably a cyma. Sign painters and scholars of sign history have a vocabulary not common to the world of printing and typography. In fact, the literature of the sign trade is not widely known to outsiders, either. Finding the name of an element is sometimes difficult, but thanks to sign painter and sign historian Mark Datis

L'A

of Studio Arts & Letters in Denver, I can pass along the following information about the cyma. It is an excerpt from an instructional manual published by The Detroit School of Lettering shortly after the turn of the century.

"... we wish to call the students' attention to a very useful detail called the cyma, meaning 'a wave.' Its purpose, in most instances, is to fill up, or equalize, the space between letters."

L'A ligature with cyma: available with the Macintosh operating system. Not available in Windows.

COUNCIL

BROTHERS
REGULAR
BOLD
SUPER SLANT
&
ALTERNATES
8/10 POINTS

COUNCIL WAS INSPIRED by some capital letters, planographically printed, on a candy tin I bought at an antique store. The tin is the size and shape of a hat box, and it was made in the early 1900s for **JOHN G. WOODWARD & CO** of **COUNCIL BLUFFS, IOWA**. The lettering is interesting to me both for its skillful design and because of its strong resemblance to wood type. The lettering is neither perfectly consistent nor slavishly executed, but it has the general look of being composed rather than drawn. Curiously, though, while this lettering style has many of the display attributes of wood type, it appears not to have been copied from any one known wood type font of its day. It is a meticulous synthesis of typographic and lithographic sensibilities. In my estimation, its dense, compact appearance seems to be the result of a commercial lettering artist's unabashed admiration of xylographic poster types. I regard it as an example of mimicry in the best sense of the word.

MY WORK ON COUNCIL began in 1996 and concluded this year. I tried to develop the main font with as much fidelity to the proportions of the characters on the candy tin as was reasonable, while adhering to certain established typeface production standards of today. (This typeface is kerned, for instance.) Of the full-size capitals in the face, only those I found in the name and location on the candy tin owe their shapes to one particular source. Thus, the **A, B, C, D, F, G, H, I, J, L, N, O, R, S, U, W**, and **&** all have models. I should mention that the **D** is unusual because it is the only letter with a convex side in my alphabet. This inconsistency exists in the original and is one I decided to preserve. The **S**, by comparison, had a squarish form I did not favor, so I deviated from it in my font. The balance of the upper case and small caps, plus the figures, punctuation, monetary symbols and miscellaneous reference signs represent my attempt to fill out the font.

THE WORD LOGOS were added later. There are no stacked letters to be seen on the candy tin, and just one raised letter, but given the narrowness of the characters in my font, I thought that short stacks or other arrangements of characters would be useful as a companion set. Zuzana Licko arranged them into two volumes.

BROTHERS

THIS SERIES OF FACES, like Council, began as a font of capital letters in 1996 and was finished in 1999. The Bold weight was the first to be designed. Its inspiration came from a bright chromolithographed letterhead designed around the turn of the century for the **COLE BROTHERS** traveling shows, an extravaganza of acrobatic and circus acts that included trained horses with bareback riders. There is a quality of boldness and daring in the letters that I think accurately reflects the directness and bravado of circus performers.

THE **COLE BROTHERS STATIONERY** has quite a bit of variation in the letterform proportions, unlike the uniformity of the lettering on which Council is based. The letters are not very typographic, nor are they very consistent. They were drawn on a lithography stone and were "cut-in," meaning that the lettering artist filled the panel background and left the letters showing in reverse. A notable feature of work done in this manner is that it is relatively easy to get sharp outer edges, such as the bevels on the corners of the octagonal **O**, but it is difficult (often, impractical) to try for sharp corners on the counters, even where they should appear square, as on the inside of an **H**. Thus, many of the capitals are bracketed inside. There are some exceptions, however, where strokes join at acute angles, as in **A, K, M, N, V, W, X, Y, Z** and **Æ**. The crotches of these letters contain "traps" that deepen the negative space for the sake of keeping the letterforms crisp. Also, because the lower case characters are expected to be used in a smaller range of sizes than the capitals, most of the bracketing has been eliminated.

AS THE BROTHERS FONT SERIES GREW, I made several alternate capitals for the Bold, then designed a Regular weight to match in style. Next came a lower case for the Regular and a set of slightly smaller (about 90%) caps to serve the full-size Bold Caps. These have the same alternate forms found in the companion font.

Finally, I created a pseudo-italic version of the Regular. It is actually more an extreme oblique than it is a legitimate italic (having fewer cursive-inspired forms than normal). I call it a "Super Slant." It has alternates that match those in the Brothers Regular Alternates fonts, and a few extras as well.

BROTHERS WORD LOGOS are a hodge podge. They come in various forms and from various sources – mainly from lithography, typography, and commercial lettering. These Word Logos were not inspired by the **COLE BROTHERS** stationery. Rather, they have grown as a collection of devices that I think will add nostalgia and utility to the digital repertoire of typographers and sign makers alike.

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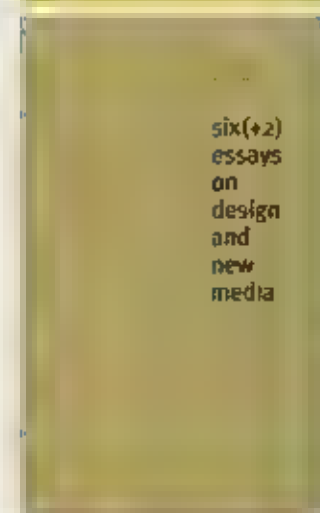
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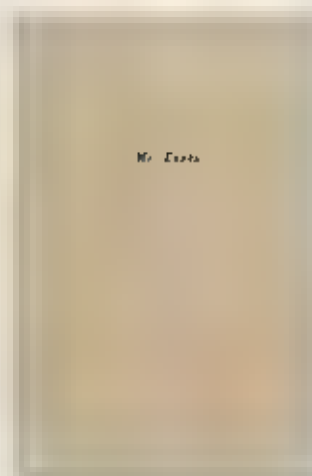
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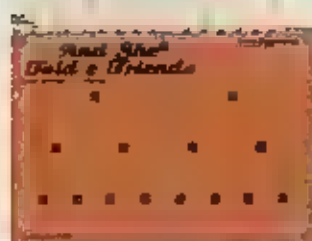
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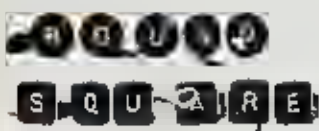

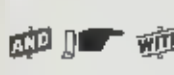



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CHAPTER

5

WHY JOHNNY
CAN'T DISSENT

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US





WHY JOHNNY CAN'T DISSENT

The public be damned! I work for my stockholders.

- William H. Vanderbilt, 1879

Break the rules. Stand apart. Keep your head.

Go with your heart.

TV commercial for Vanderbilt perfume, 1994

THOMAS FRANK

CAPITALISM IS CHANGING, obviously and drastically, but our ideas about capitalism — about what's wrong with American life and about how the figures responsible are to be confronted — haven't changed much in thirty years. Call it, for convenience, the "countercultural idea." It holds that the paramount ailment of our society is conformity, a malady that has variously been described as over-organization, bureaucracy, homogeneity, hierarchy, logocentrism, technocracy, the Combine, the Apollonian. We all know what it is and what it does. It transforms humanity into "organization man," into "the man in the gray flannel suit." It is "Moloch whose mind is pure machinery," the "incomprehensible prison" that consumes "brains and imagination." It is artifice, starched shirts, tailfins, carefully mowed lawns and always, always the consciousness of impending nuclear destruction. It is a stiff, militaristic order that seeks to suppress instinct, to forbid sex and pleasure, to deny basic human impulses and individuality, to enforce through a rigid uniformity a meaningless plastic consumerism.

As this half of the countercultural idea originated during the 1950s, it is appropriate that the evils of conformity are most conveniently summarized with images of 1950s suburban correctness. You know, that land of sedate music, sexual repression, deference to authority, red-scares, and smiling white people standing politely in line to go to church. Constantly appearing as a symbol of arch-backwardness in advertising and movies, it is an image we find easy to evoke.

The ways in which this system are to be resisted are equally well understood and agreed-upon. The Establishment demands homogeneity; we revolt by embracing diverse, individual lifestyles. It demands self-denial and rigid adherence to convention; we revolt through immediate gratification, instinct uninhibited, and liberation of the libido and the appetites. Few have put it more bluntly than Jerry Rubin did in 1970, "Amerika

says: Don't! The yippies say: Do It!" The countercultural idea is hostile to any law and every establishment. "Whenever we see a rule, we must break it," Rubin continued. "Only by breaking rules do we discover who we are." Above all rebellion consists of a sort of Nietzschean antinomianism, an automatic questioning of rules, a rejection of whatever social prescriptions we've happened to inherit. Just Do It is the whole of the law.

The patron saints of the countercultural idea are, of course, the Beats, whose frenzied style and merry alienation still maintain a powerful grip on the American imagination. Even forty years after the publication of *On The Road*, the works of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs remain the *sine qua non* of dissidence, the model for aspiring poets, rock stars, or indeed anyone who feels vaguely artistic or alienated. That frenzied sensibility of pure experience, life on the edge, immediate gratification, and total freedom from moral restraint which the Beats first propounded back in those heady days when suddenly everyone could have their own tv and powerful V-8, has stuck with us through all the intervening years and become something of a permanent American style. Go to any poetry reading and you can see a string of junior Kerouacs go through the routine, upsetting cultural hierarchies by pushing themselves to the limit, straining for that gorgeous moment of original vice when Allen Ginsberg first read "Howl" in 1955 and the patriarchs of our fantasies recoiled in shock. The Gap may have since claimed Ginsberg and *USA Today* may run feature stories about the brilliance of the beloved Kerouac, but the rebel race continues today regardless, with ever-heightening shit-references calculated to scare Jesse Helms, talk about sex and smack that is supposed to bring the electricity of real life, and ever-more determined defiance of the repressive rules and mores of the American 1950s — rules and mores which by now we know only from movies.

But one hardly has to go to a poetry reading to see the countercultural idea acted out. Its frenzied ecstasies have long since become an official aesthetic of consumer society, a monotheme of mass as well as adversarial culture. Turn on the tv and there it is instantly: the unending drama of consumer unbound and in search of an ever-heightened good time, the inescapable rock 'n' roll soundtrack, dreadlocks and pony tails bounding into Taco Bells, a drunken, swinging-camera epiphany of tennis shoes, outlaw soda pops, and mind bending dan-



Thomas Frank
is co-founder and editor-in-chief
of *The Baffler* and the author
of *The Conquest of Cool*

druff shampoos. Corporate America, it turns out, no longer speaks in the voice of oppressive order that it did when Ginsberg moaned in 1956 that *Time* magazine was

always telling me about responsibility.

Businessmen are serious. Movie producers are serious

Everybody's serious but me.

Nobody wants you to think they're serious today, least of all Time/Warner. On the contrary: the culture trust is now our leader in the Ginsbergian search for kicks upon kicks. Corporate America is not an oppressor but a sponsor of fun, provider of lifestyle accouterments, facilitator of carnival, our slang-speaking partner in the quest for that ever-more apocalyptic orgasm. The countercultural idea has become capitalist orthodoxy, its hunger for transgression upon transgression now perfectly suited to an economic-cultural regime that runs on ever-faster cyclings of the new; its taste for self-fulfillment and its intolerance for the confines of tradition now permitting vast latitude in consuming practices and lifestyle experimentation.

Consumerism is no longer about "conformity" but about "difference." Advertising teaches us not in the ways of puritanical self-denial (a bizarre notion on the face of it), but in orgiastic, never-ending self-fulfillment. It counsels not rigid adherence to the tastes of the herd but vigilant and constantly-updated individualism. We consume not to fit in, but to prove, on the surface at least, that we are rock 'n' roll rebels, each one of us as rule-breaking and hierarchy-defying as our heroes of the 60s, who now pitch cars, shoes, and beer. This imperative of endless difference is today the genius at the heart of American capitalism, an eternal fleeing from "sameness" that satiates our thirst for the New with such achievements of civilization as the infinite brands of identical cola, the myriad colors and irrepressible variety of the cigarette rack at 7-11.

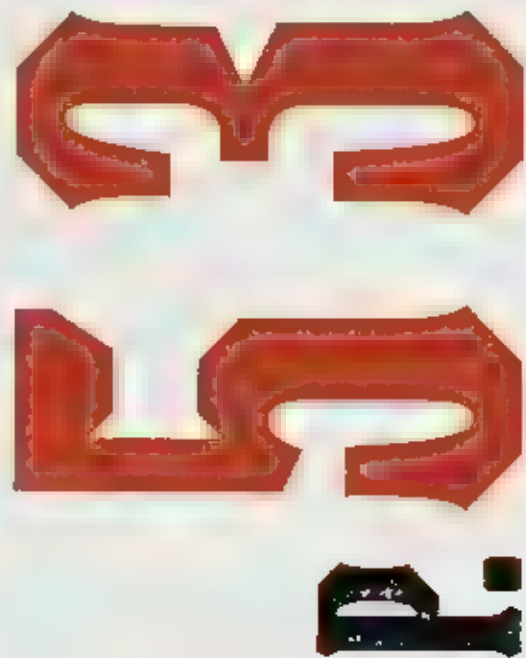
As existential rebellion has become a more or less official style of Information Age capitalism, so has the countercultural notion of a static, repressive Establishment grown hopelessly obsolete. However the basic impulses of the countercultural idea may have disturbed a nation lost in Cold War darkness, they are today in fundamental agreement with the basic tenets of Information Age business theory. So close are they, in fact, that it has become difficult to understand the countercultural idea as anything more than the self-justifying ideology of the new bourgeoisie that has arisen since the 1960s, the cultural means by which this group has proven itself ever so much better skilled than its slow-moving, security-minded forebears at adapting to the accelerated, always-changing consumerism of today. The anointed cultural opponents of capitalism are now capitalism's ideologues.

The two come together in perfect synchronization in a figure like Camille Paglia whose ravings are grounded in the absolutely non-controversial ideas of the golden Sixties. According to Paglia, American business is still exactly what it was believed to have been in that beloved decade, that is, "puritanical and desensualized." Its great opponents are, of course, liberated figures like "the beatniks", Bob Dylan, and the Beatles. Culture is, quite simply, a binary battle between the repressive Apollonian order of capitalism and the Dionysian impulses of the counterculture. Rebellion makes no sense without repression; we must remain forever convinced of capitalism's fundamental hostility to pleasure in order to consume capitalism's rebel products as avidly as we do. It comes as little surprise when, after criticizing the "Apollonian capitalist machine" (in her book, *Vamps & Tramps*), Paglia applauds American mass culture (in *Utne Reader*), the preeminent product of that "capitalist machine," as a "third great eruption" of a Dionysian "paganism." For her, as for most other designated dissidents, there is no contradiction between replaying the standard critique of capitalist conformity and repressiveness and then endorsing its rebel products — for Paglia the car culture and Madonna — as the obvious solution: the Culture Trust offers both Establishment and Resistance in one convenient package. The only question that remains is why Paglia has not yet landed an endorsement contract from a soda pop or automobile manufacturer.

Other legendary exponents of the countercultural idea have been more fortunate — William S. Burroughs, for example, who appears in a television spot for the Nike corporation. But so openly does the commercial flaunt the confluence of capital and counterculture that it has brought considerable criticism down on the head of the aging beat. Writing in the *Village Voice*, Leslie Savan marvels at the contradiction between Burroughs's writings and the faceless corporate entity for which he is now pushing product. "Now the realization that *nothing* threatens the system has freed advertising to exploit even the most marginal elements of society," Savan observes. "In fact, being hip is no longer quite enough

better the pitchman be 'underground.'" Meanwhile Burroughs's manager insists, as all future Cultural Studies treatments of the ad will no doubt also insist, that Burroughs's presence actually makes the commercial "deeply subversive" — "I hate to repeat the usual mantra, but you know, homosexual drug addict, manslaughter, accidental homicide." But Savan wonders whether, in fact, it is Burroughs who has been assimilated by corporate America. "The problem comes," she writes, "in how easily any idea, deed, or image can become part of the sponsored world."

The most startling revelation to emerge from the



Burroughs/Nike partnership is not that corporate America has overwhelmed its cultural foes or that Burroughs can somehow remain "subversive" through it all, but the complete lack of dissonance between the two sides. Of course Burroughs is not "subversive," but neither has he "sold out": His ravings are no longer appreciably different from the official folklore of American capitalism. What's changed is not Burroughs, but business itself. As expertly as Burroughs once bayoneted American proprieties, as stridently as he once proclaimed himself beyond the laws of man and God, he is today a respected ideologue of the Information Age, occupying roughly the position in the pantheon of corporate-cultural thought once reserved strictly for Notre Dame football coaches and positive-thinking Methodist ministers. His inspirational writings are boardroom favorites, his dark nihilistic burpings the happy homilies of the new corporate faith.

For with the assumption of power by Drucker's and Reich's new class has come an entirely new ideology of business, a way of justifying and exercising power that has little to do with the "conformity" and the "establishment" so vilified by the countercultural idea. The management theorists and "leadership" charlatans of the Information Age don't waste their time prattling about hierarchy and regulation, but about disorder, chaos, and the meaninglessness of convention. With its reorganization around information, capitalism has developed a new mythology, a sort of corporate antinomianism according to which the breaking of rules and the elimination of rigid corporate structure have become the central article of faith for millions of aspiring executives.

Dropping *Naked Lunch* and picking up *Thriving on Chaos*, the ground-breaking 1987 management text by Tom Peters, the most popular business writer of the past decade, one finds more philosophical similarities than one would expect from two manifestos of, respectively, dissident culture and business culture. If anything, Peters's celebration of disorder is, by virtue of its hard statistics, bleaker and more nightmarish than Burroughs'. For this popular lecturer on such once-blithe topics as competitiveness and pop psychology there is nothing, absolutely nothing, that is certain. His world is one in which the corporate wisdom of the past is meaningless, established customs are ridiculous, and "rules" are some sort of curse, a remnant of the foolish 50s that exist to be defied, not obeyed. We live in what Peters calls "A World Turned Upside Down," in which whirl is king and in order to survive, businesses must eventually embrace Peters' universal solution: "Revolution!" "To meet the demands of the fast-changing competitive scene," he counsels, "we must simply learn to love change as much as we have hated it in the past." He advises businessmen to become Robespierres of routine, to demand of their

underlings, "'What have you changed lately?,' 'How fast are you changing?,' and 'Are you pursuing bold enough change goals?'" "Revolution," of course, means for Peters the same thing it did to Burroughs and Ginsberg, Presley and the Stones in their heyday: breaking rules, pissing off the suits, shocking the bean-counters: "Actively and publicly hail defiance of the rules, many of which you doubtless labored mightily to construct in the first place." Peters even suggests that his readers implement this hostility to logocentrism in a carnivalesque celebration, drinking beer out in "the woods" and destroying "all the forms and rules and discontinued reports" and, "if you've got real nerve," a photocopier as well.

Today corporate antinomianism is the emphatic message of nearly every new business text, continually escalating the corporate insurrection begun by Peters. Capitalism, at least as it is envisioned by the best-selling management handbooks, is no longer about enforcing Order, but destroying it. "Revolution," once the totemic catchphrase of the counterculture, has become the totemic catchphrase of boomer-as-capitalist. The Information Age businessman holds inherited ideas and traditional practices not in reverence, but in high suspicion. Even reason itself is now found to be an enemy of true competitiveness, an out-of-date faculty to be scrupulously avoided by conscientious managers. A 1990 book by Charles Handy entitled *The Age of Unreason* agrees with Peters that we inhabit a time in which "there can be no certainty" and suggests that readers engage in full-fledged epistemological revolution: "Thinking Upside Down," using new ways of "learning which can... be seen as disrespectful if not downright rebellious," methods of approaching problems that have "never been popular with the upholders of continuity and of the status quo." Three years later the authors of *Reengineering the Corporation* ("a Manifesto for Business Revolution," as its subtitle declares) are ready to push this doctrine even farther. Not only should we be suspicious of traditional practices, but we should cast out virtually everything learned over the past two centuries!

Business reengineering means putting aside much of the received wisdom of two hundred years of industrial management. It means forgetting how work was done in the age of the mass market and deciding how it can best be done now. In business reengineering, old job titles and old organizational arrangements — departments, divisions, groups, and so on — cease to matter. They are artifacts of another age.

As countercultural rebellion becomes corporate ideology, even the beloved Buddhism of the Beats wins a place on the executive bookshelf. In *The Leader as Martial Artist* (1993) Arnold Mindell, "Ph.D.," advises men of commerce in the ways of the Tao, mastery of which

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he likens, of course, to surfing. For Mindell's Zen businessman, as for the followers of Tom Peters, the world is a wildly chaotic place of opportunity, navigable only to an enlightened "leader" who can discern the "time-spirits" at work behind the scenes. In terms Peters himself might use were he a more more meditative sort of inspiration professional, Mindell explains that "the wise facilitator" doesn't seek to prevent the inevitable and random clashes between "conflicting field spirits," but to anticipate such bouts of disorder and profit thereby.

Contemporary corporate fantasy imagines a world of ceaseless, turbulent change, of centers that ecstatically fail to hold, of joyous extinction for the craven gray-flannel creature of the past. Businessmen today decorate the walls of their offices not with portraits of President Eisenhower and emblems of suburban order, but with images of extreme athletic daring, with sayings about "diversity" and "empowerment" and "thinking outside the box." They theorize their world not in the bar car of the commuter train, but in weepful corporate retreats at which they beat their tom-toms and envision themselves as part of the great avant-garde tradition of edge-livers, risk-takers, and ass-kickers. Their world is a place not of sublimation and conformity, but of "leadership" and bold talk about defying the herd. And there is nothing this new enlightened species of businessman despises more than "rules" and "reason." The prominent culture-warriors of the right may believe that the counterculture was capitalism's undoing, but the antinomian businessmen know better. "One of the t-shirt slogans of the sixties read, 'Question authority,'" the authors of *Reengineering the Corporation* write. "Process owners might buy their reengineering team members the nineties version: 'Question assumptions.'"

The new businessman quite naturally gravitates to the slogans and sensibility of the rebel 60s to express his understanding of the new Information World. He is led in what one magazine calls "the business revolution" by the office-park subversives it hails as "business activists," "change agents," and "corporate radicals." He speaks to his comrades through commercials like the recent one for "Warp," a type of IBM computer operating system, in which an electric guitar soundtrack and psychedelic video effects surround hip executives with earrings and hairdos who are visibly stunned by the product's gnarly 'tude (It's a "totally cool way to run your computer," read the product's print ads). He understands the world through *Fast Company*, a successful new magazine whose editors take their inspiration from Hunter S. Thompson and whose stories describe such things as a "dis organization" that inhabits an "anti-office" where "all vestiges of hierarchy have disappeared" or a computer scientist who is also "a rabble rouser, an agent provocateur, a product of the 1960s who

never lost his activist fire or democratic values." He is what sociologists Paul Leinberger and Bruce Tucker have called "The New Individualist," the new and improved manager whose arty worldview and creative hip derive directly from his formative 60s days. The one thing this new executive is definitely not is Organization Man, the hyper-rational counter of beans, attender of church, and wearer of stiff hats.

In television commercials, through which the new American businessman presents his visions and self-understanding to the public, perpetual revolution and the gospel of rule-breaking are the orthodoxy of the day. You only need to watch for a few minutes before you see one of these slogans and understand the grip of antinomianism over the corporate mind.

Sometimes You Gotta Break the Rules (Burger King)
If You Don't Like the Rules, Change Them (WXRT FM)
The Rules Have Changed (Dodge)
The Art of Changing (Swatch)
There's no one way to do it. (Levi's)
This is different. Different is good. (Arby's)
Just Different From the Rest (Special Export beer)
The Line Has Been Crossed: The Revolutionary New Supra (Toyota)
Resist the Usual (the slogan of both Clash Clear Malt and Young & Rubicam — maybe they'll sue each other!)
Innovate Don't Imitate (Hugo Boss)
Chart Your Own Course (Navigator Cologne)
It separates you from the crowd (Vision Cologne)

In most, the commercial message is driven home with the vanguard iconography of the rebel: screaming guitars, whirling cameras, and startled old timers who, we predict, will become an increasingly indispensable prop as consumers require ever-greater assurances that, Yes! You are a rebel! Just look at how offended they are!

The problem with cultural dissent in America isn't that it's been co-opted, absorbed, or ripped-off. Of course it's been all of these things. But the reason it has proven so hopelessly susceptible to such assaults is the same as the reason it has become so harmless in the first place, so toothless even before Mr. Geffen's boys discover it angsty away in some bar in Lawrence, Kansas: it is no longer any different from the official culture it's supposed to be subverting. The basic impulses of the countercultural idea, as descended from the holy Beats, are about as threatening to the new breed of antinomian businessmen as Anthony Robbins, selling success & how to achieve it on a late-night infomercial.

Our businessmen imagine themselves rebels, and our rebels sound more and more like ideologists of business. Henry Rollins, for example, the maker of loutish, overbearing music and composer of high-school grade

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poetry, straddles both worlds unproblematically. Rollins's writing and lyrics strike all the standard alienated literary poses: he rails against over-civilization and yearns to "disconnect." He veers back and forth between vague threats towards "weak" people who "bring me down" and blustery declarations of his weightlifting ability and physical prowess. As a result he ruled for several years as the preeminent darling of *Details* magazine, a periodical handbook for the young executive on the rise where rebellion has achieved a perfect synthesis with corporate ideology. In 1992 *Details* named Rollins a "rock 'n' roll samurai," an "emblem...of a new masculinity" whose "enlightened honesty" is "a way of being that seems to flesh out many of the ideas expressed in contemporary culture and fashion." In 1994 the magazine consummated its relationship with Rollins by naming him "Man of the Year," printing a fawning story about his muscular worldview and decorating its cover with a photo in which Rollins displays his tattoos and rubs his chin in a thoughtful manner.

Details found Rollins to be such an appropriate role model for the struggling young businessman not only because of his music-product, but because of his excellent "self-styled identity," which the magazine describes in terms normally reserved for the breast-beating and soul-searching variety of motivational seminars. Although he derives it from the quality-maximizing wisdom of the East rather than the unfashionable doctrines of Calvin, Rollins's rebel posture is identical to that fabled ethic of the small capitalist whose regimen of positive thinking and hard work will one day pay off. *Details* describes one of Rollins's songs, quite seriously, as "a self-motivational superforce, an anthem of empowerment," teaching lessons that any aspiring middle-manager must internalize. Elsewhere Iggy Pop, that great chronicler of the ambitionless life, praises Rollins as a "high achiever" who "wants to go somewhere." Rollins himself even seems to invite such an interpretation. His recent spoken-word account of touring with Black Flag, delivered in an unrelenting two-hour drill-instructor staccato, begins with the timeless bourgeois story of opportunity taken, of young Henry leaving the security of a "straight job," enlisting with a group of visionaries who were "the hardest working people I have ever seen," and learning "what hard work is all about." In the liner notes he speaks proudly of his Deming-esque dedication to quality, of how his bandmates "Delivered under pressure at incredible odds." When describing his relationship with his parents for the readers of *Details*, Rollins quickly cuts to the critical matter, the results that such dedication has brought: "Mom, Dad, I outgross both of you put together," a happy observation he repeats in his interview with the *New York Times Magazine*.

Despite the extreme hostility of punk rockers with

which Rollins had to contend all through the 1980s, it is he who has been chosen by the commercial media as the godfather of rock 'n' roll revolt. It is not difficult to see why. For Rollins the punk rock decade was but a lengthy seminar on leadership skills, thriving on chaos, and total quality management. Rollins's much-celebrated anger is indistinguishable from the anger of the frustrated junior executive who finds obstacles on the way to the top. His discipline and determination are the automatic catechism of any small entrepreneur who's just finished brainwashing himself with the latest leadership and positive-thinking tracts; his poetry is the inspired verse of *21 Days to Unlimited Power* or *Let's Get Results, Not Excuses*. Henry Rollins is no more a threat to established power in America than was Dale Carnegie. And yet Rollins as king of the rebels — peerless and ultimate — is the message hammered home wherever photos of his growling visage appears. If you're unhappy with your lot, the Culture Trust tells us with each new tale of Rollins, if you feel you must rebel, take your cue from the most disgruntled guy of all: lift weights! work hard! meditate in your back yard! root out the weaknesses deep down inside yourself! But whatever you do, *don't* think about who controls power or how it is wielded.

THE STRUCTURE AND THINKING of American business have changed enormously in the years since our popular conceptions of its problems and abuses were formulated. In the meantime the mad frothings and jolly apolitical revolt of Beat, despite their vast popularity and insurgent air, have become powerless against a new regime that, one suspects, few of Beat's present-day admirers and practitioners feel any need to study or understand. Today that beautiful countercultural idea, endorsed now by everyone from the surviving Beats to shampoo manufacturers, is more the official doctrine of corporate America than it is a program of resistance. What we understand as "dissent" does not subvert, does not challenge, does not even question the cultural faiths of Western business. What David Rieff wrote of the revolutionary pretensions of multiculturalism is equally true of the countercultural idea: "The more one reads in academic multiculturalist journals and in business publications, and the more one contrasts the speeches of CEOs and the speeches of noted multiculturalist academics, the more one is struck by the similarities in the way they view the world." What's happened is not co-optation or appropriation, but a simple and direct confluence of interest.

The people who staff the Combine aren't like Nurse Ratched. They aren't Frank Burns, they aren't the Church Lady, they aren't Dean Wormer from *Animal House*, they aren't those repressed old folks in the commercials who want to ban Tropicana Fruit Twisters. They're hipper

than you can ever hope to be because *hip* is *their* official ideology, and they're always going to be there at the poetry reading to encourage your "rebellion" with a hearty "right on, man!" before you even know they're in the auditorium. You can't outrun them, or even stay ahead of them for very long: it's their racetrack, and that's them waiting at the finish line to congratulate you on how *outrageous* your new style is, on how you *shocked* those stuffy prudes out in the heartland.



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EMIGRE

CHAPTER

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BUT IS IT
ADVERTISING?

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BUT IS IT ADVERTISING?

Capitalist Realism at the Clio Awards

JONATHAN DEE

AMERICAN TELEVISION IS SURFEITED with award shows, a fact that may account for the mood of existential doubt, of boosterism and flop sweat, pervading the rare awards show that hasn't managed to get itself televised. In any case, the familiar, louche sense of import ("we're running a little overtime") one associates with the Oscars or the Grammys is missing from the opening night of the 1998 Clio Awards, the advertising industry's self-administered honors for artistic excellence. A jazz trio plays onstage as we find our seats in the orchestra of the smallish Henry Hudson Theater just off Broadway; sales of the \$75 tickets, a backward glance reveals, have scarcely been brisk enough to necessitate opening the balconies.

The Clio Awards International Festival confers its honors over two consecutive evenings in May: the first night's ceremony is devoted to print ads, posters, billboards, and package design; the second, to tv, radio, and Web sites. tv, of course, is the *ne plus ultra* of creative advertising; still, Andrew Jaffe, the affable, curly-haired executive director of the Clios, does his best, as the print ceremony's opening speaker, to rouse the audience to a comparable pitch of anticipation. Print, he says not once but twice, is "the soul of our craft." His efforts are seriously undercut, however, by the second speaker on the program, the fetchingly stern Marie-Catherine Dupuy, chief creative officer of the French agency bdd/Conseil and chairperson of this year's Clio jury. "All of us," she says in heavily accented English, "felt that print this year was a little disappointing"; and on that chilly note, the passing out of awards commences.

In a 1984 speech to the National Arts Club, John Updike compared the craftsmen of modern advertisements ("the aesthetic marvels of our age") to the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poets and Paleolithic cave painters: "one can only regret," he said, "that except within narrow professional circles the artists involved...are unknown by name." Along those lines, one might guess that the rationale for celebrating artistic excellence in advertising would be to lift the artists themselves out of that anonymity, for one night at least. Alas, the awards are presented not to individuals but to their agencies; and as for acceptance speeches, Jaffe has genially forbidden them in the interest of time. As each winning ad is

flashed on an overhead video screen, its creators (or their bosses) walk up the stairs stage left, accept their statuette from the award girl without breaking a stride (though some seize the opportunity to double-kiss Ms. Dupuy, who looks like Jeanne Moreau), and head down stairs again stage right. The thirty seconds or so of each pop song ("Sunshine of Your Love," "Satisfaction" "We Are the Champions,") played by the pit orchestra to cover this exchange turns out to be fifteen seconds too long, we wait awkwardly for the conductor to lift his head, notice the empty stage, and stop the music.

The other members of the Clio jury — creative executives from around the world — seem to have been right on Ms. Dupuy's parsimonious wavelength; although the Clio guidelines call for the awarding of Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals in each of a hundred or so categories, the jurors frequently bend the rules with an authoritarian whimsy to show their disdain for the work they're honoring, such as in the Public Service Print category, in which they award no Golds, no Silvers, but *seven* Bronzes. The honorees find their own ways to express their disrespect for the proceedings: some saunter onstage at this black-tie-optional event wearing jeans and sneakers, and a few winners, Brando-like, don't show up at all, leaving the presenter squinting into the audience while the band plays "satisfaction" again.

Technical glitches abound. Even the centerpiece of the evening — a tribute to Bill Bernbach (the father of advertising's "Creative Revolution" of the 1950s, which overthrew the hard sell in favor of the more subtle persuasions of art) and the announcement of a scholarship fund for minorities established in his name — is marred when the wrong slide is flashed on the screen above. And when the Grand Clio for print work goes to the Leo Burnett agency in London for a Mercedes ad titled "Skidmarks," no one seems troubled by the fact that the copy for this best advertisement of the year is illegible on the video screen. In all, seventy-two awards are handed out in an hour and five minutes, a pace most award shows can only dream of. The whole thing is over by 8:15, and when Jaffe says in closing that the evening seems to have run a bit ahead of schedule, he looks almost relieved.

SUCH A CHEESY AND DISPIRITED Part One of the two-day Clio gala is enough to raise doubts as to whether the Clios have yet bounced back from the ignominy of their own recent history. On June 13, 1991, the Clios, already thir-

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Jonathan Dee
is the author of the novels
St. Famous, *The Liberty Campaign*,
and *The Lover of History*

ty one years old and a seeming institution, disintegrated in spectacular fashion at a print-awards gala much like this one. An audience of 300 waited hours for that ceremony to start, unaware that neither bankrupt, crack-addicted Clio chairman Bill Evans, nor the unpaid event staff, nor a complete list of winners, was anywhere on site. When at length the crowd grew surly, the evening's emcee, P.R. man Don Catterson, deputized a caterer named Steve, and the two of them went onstage and began passing out awards, working from a partial script that in many cases had the name of the winning commercial but not the agency that produced it. But when Catterson ran out of names with more than eighty Clios still unrepresented (he tried to announce an "intermission," during which he would presumably have made a run for it), the exasperated attendees stormed the stage in their evening clothes, making off with the remaining statuettes by the fistful. "Advertising's own *Day of the Locust*," writer Trip Gabriel called it. The subsequent night of tv awards—for which 1,500 people had paid \$175 for tickets they never received, and which Fox had contracted to televise—was canceled. In the wake of that catastrophe the Clio organization changed ownership but still suffered the loss of much of its prestige; although it remains, in Jaffe's words, "the only advertising award your mother has ever heard of," it competes with several industry awards shows, as well as with year-end honors issued by trade magazines such as *Advertising Age*.

But on the second night of this year's Clios, at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, it's much easier to believe that the bad times are over. The dress is more elegant, the hors d'oeuvres are fancier, the warm-up jazz trio has been replaced by reggae legend Toots and the Maytals; the charisma of television warms the room, and the previous night's proceedings suddenly seem the equivalent of the second-tier "ceremony held earlier" referred to in the course of the Oscars or the Tonys. A buzz of youth and hipness coexists easily with the sleekness that comes of sitting atop a \$200 billion industry. The evening feels, as a good awards show should feel, like the center of the cultural universe—despite the fact that tonight is coincidentally also the night of the *Seinfeld* finale, interspersed with million-dollar commercials. Indeed, the proceedings start with Jaffe's satisfied announcement that NBC has agreed to mail a free video-cassette of the final *Seinfeld*, commercials and all, to everyone holding a ticket for tonight's ceremony.

The Clios in no way reflect an ad's impact on the sales of the product it promotes—a relationship that is virtually impossible to quantify anyway. The awards are intended solely as a measure of aesthetic excellence; and in the year just past, a somewhat mollified Dupuy reports to the Lincoln Center audience, aesthetic excellence was synonymous with humor. "Our public wanted to laugh,"

she says soberly, "and the creative community responded. There were many ads this year which made you laugh but very few which made you cry or even think."

Well, this may be true in one way: very few of the 120 prize-winning ads we then sit through seem designed to make us think. But while watching three or four commercials in a row, if only through force of habit, preclude thought, watching nearly three straight hours of the year's best commercials from around the world cannot help but make you think a great deal. What does the idea of "aesthetic excellence" really mean in conjunction with the craft of advertising? Can advertising be discussed without condescension, as an art?

And just because something is art, does that mean it's good for you?

EARLY IN THE EVENING, a Silver in the Entertainment Promotion category goes to an ad for the Washington State Lottery, a witty execution of a type of mini-fable familiar to anyone who watches tv. Three buddies sit in a modest living room watching the closing minute of a football game. The home team has a crucial call to make: while two of the buddies excitedly shout conflicting advice at the screen, the third calmly activates a red-but-toned intercom; we see the coach onscreen answer his headset, and the buddy—who, we realize, has bought the team with his lottery prize money—calls the winning play from his chair.

A thirty-second comedy, lightly amusing and discrete. The fact that one man's "entertainment" may be another man's regressive tax on the poor doesn't keep this government-commissioned fantasy of empowerment from going down like candy. Still seeing it take its place in tonight's unbroken parade of tv ads—ads of a very different nature, on the face of them—casts the lottery spot in another, more paradigmatic light. We watch, for instance, a commercial in which a boy's loving relationship with his Down syndrome-afflicted brother is symbolized by the former teaching the latter the proper method for eating an Oreo. A wealthy man receives a notice from his wife's attorney. "Half? She gets half?" he says. "I'll give her half," and he proceeds to chainsaw in two every item in his mansion, until he reaches the garage and lays eyes on his beautiful Infiniti, whereupon he says softly, "On second thought, maybe we can work this out." A "Performance" Clio, cynically enough, goes to a Hewlett-Packard spot that offers the genuine autobiographical reminiscences of Negro League legend John "Buck" O'Neil, grandson of a slave, who talks about the death of racism in his lifetime and links it with the wonders of the Internet; "That's progress," he says.

Although the doctrine, as it applies to Russian art, has blessedly passed from the earth, the term "socialist realism" is still one with which many people are famil-



iar. Socialist realism describes an art, whether visual or literary, that is realistic in form but whose fealty is less to actual or individual experience than to a set of prescribed values — values that are repeatedly, didactically, seen to triumph. Such art is scornful of privacy; the characters who populate it are less individuals than abstractions, if not types, so that the capacity of its audience to see themselves in those characters, in their dilemmas and their solutions, might be maximized. Its focus is on the present, and on facilitating the acceptance of certain ideas about the future; it will, however, from time to time assist in the re-evaluation of certain ideas about the past. The production of this art, though still in the hands of individuals, is heavily subsidized — and its availability determined — by those in positions of power. Such art is usually simple to understand, not because its creators are dolts but because their aim is to communicate their message to the greatest number of people. The artists' hope is not that this portrait of society will be accurate but that society will be inspired to resemble the portrait.

An evening at the Clios makes more or less inescapable the connection between this sort of sponsored art and the art of the American television commercial: an aesthetic, in the term suggested by sociologist Michael Schudson, of "capitalist realism." Of course there are important semantic differences (Soviet art glorifies the producer; American advertising, the consumer), as well as a near reversal of the values such art is commissioned to protect — except, perhaps, to the degree that power itself can be considered a value. But the central value of American capitalist realism remains, for all its staggering refinement, as old as Marx: the fetishism of commodities. Capitalist realism amounts to an insistent portrait of the world as a garden of consumption in which any need — no matter how antimaterial, how intimate, or how social — can be satisfied by buying the right things. The relationship between the human qualities with which this art animates a given commodity and the commodity itself is a wholly fictional one, and it is upon that fiction, you could say, that our economy rests.

If you take a moment to think which ads, if any, you can recall from fifteen or twenty-five years ago, chances are they fit this profile seamlessly. The peaceful teenagers of all races gathered on the hilltop, holding Cokes, who wanted to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony? The black guy who lost his legs in Vietnam, falling to the ground in a pickup basketball game and refusing to be helped up, then sinking a basket on his brand-new artificial limbs? (Who even remembers that this was an ad for Du Pont?) John Hancock's "Real Life, Real Answers" series: the unnerving, *vérité*-style dramas of a couple at the closing for their first house or a son deciding how to provide nursing care for his elderly father? "You've come

a long way, baby"? The relative heavy handedness of these landmark ads may render them old-fashioned, but their technique is hardly outdated; this transubstantiation of consumer goods is still, as it's always been, the way most advertising works.

A campaign too current to qualify for the 1998 Clios, for Saturn automobiles, provides a museum quality specimen. A black Saturn dealer reminisces about the day his own father bought a new car: "I don't think he was treated fairly," the man says over what looks like actual home movies, though they may well not be. "Those were the times we lived in.... And when I decided I wanted to go into the car business, I wanted to make him proud of me. Saturn was really an extension of my own personal values. We treat all of our customers the same. And that's the way it should be.... Had Saturn been around then, it would have been entirely different. I think Dad would have come home smiling." Another Saturn ad features factory workers *dancing* as they assemble car radios. Is it really such a leap to think of this corporate portrait of ecstatic laborers as a kind of official art?

"Why do I use the card?" says Jake Burton, the man who invented the modern snowboard, in a recent American Express ad. "All my life, I've done things my own way. American Express never questioned that." To which one might well respond, Well, why the hell would they? But this individualist, who feels only gratitude for the non-interference in his private life of a multinational corporation, is the perfect capitalist-realist hero — a "rebel" whose dissent is confined to the products he chooses to buy.

If there's one great obstacle to understanding advertising art this way, it's that commercials' dominant aesthetic quality — humor — is the last thing we tend to associate with officially sanctioned art under Stalin or Hitler or Mao. But the rise of humor, especially self-deprecating humor, in advertisements goes hand-in-hand with what *The Conquest of Cool* author Thomas Frank has established as advertising's (and capitalism's) great achievement in the years since the 1960s: incorporating the idea of dissent from the doctrine of consumption into the doctrine itself. When Canon markets a new camera by naming it the Rebel, when Burger King tells us that "sometimes you've got to break the rules," when, on the screen at Lincoln Center, a Gold Clio-winning ad for the software company Oracle intones that "a revolution is in our destiny," what these ads are really promoting is the idea of restlessness as a kind of conformity, of the endless pursuit of what's "rebellious" as the very engine of our economy. It's easy to understand, then, why humor should be the dominant signifier of this pseudo-rebellion; it lets us impose an ironic distance between ourselves and our own decidedly unrebellious behavior.



Not surprisingly, the capitalist-realist worldview is unshy about applying itself to other cultures ("How do you keep a rhino from charging?" one African "native" asks his peers in a current tv spot; the answer: give it an American Express card). Its reach extends backward into history, in ways that become more disturbing as technology grows more amazing: one Clio-winning Mercedes ad features actual historical black-and-white footage of German autoworkers, race-car drivers, housewives, etc., whose faces have been computer-altered so that they all appear to be singing "Falling in Love Again" in unison. It extends to the animal world (the ad in which a skydiver sports with a Pepsi-drinking Canadian goose garnered three 1998 Clios; the spot ends with a flock of geese forming the Pepsi logo), which is really a way of extending itself into the realm of the divine — of asserting that our order is the natural order. Sometimes the stretch into the divine is more explicit: a Clio-winning spot for Delta Airlines titled "My Word" pictures citizens releasing into the atmosphere helium balloons whose strings are attached to cards bearing words like "Success" and "Home." Or this for Volvo: "The people you've been looking at all share a common belief. That a car saved their lives." Or Evian: "Inside me lives an eternal life force. Natural spring water from the French Alps. ."

In a world where this parallel reality is so firmly established, it's no wonder corporations have come to feel that, in the words of advertising critic Leslie Savan, "the news is just advertising by the other side."

THREE 1998 CLIOS go to one of the most horrifying commercial raids on history of this or any year: Apple's "Think Different" campaign, which shamelessly pimps the images of Einstein, Gandhi, Picasso, Martin Luther King, Amelia Earhart, and pretty much any other dead genius who lived in the age of photography. The current self-idolatry underlying these "tributes" surfaces for a moment with the disclosure, on the Lincoln Center video screen, that one of the writers of the Richard Dreyfuss voice-over ("Here's to the misfits, the rebels, the troublemakers.... While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius") is none other than Apple founder and prodigal CEO Steve Jobs; indeed, the campaign's co-creators have said that they will honor Mr. Jobs's decision not to be the subject of an ad himself.

But there's another quality that makes the "Think Different" series so perversely compelling, a strategy that identifies it, in an advertising context, as thoroughly modern. Although there has always been something capricious, not to say arrogant about commercials' willingness to endow material objects with magical properties — the summoning into existence, say, of the Pepsi Generation — at least the ads themselves were demonstrably about the products they advertised; that is, those

Pepsi ads portrayed a bunch of young, beautiful, racially diverse, absurdly upbeat people drinking lots of Pepsi. In recent years, though, the connection between a given advertisement and the product it ostensibly promotes has been stretched thinner and thinner, and now seems finally to have given way entirely. I mean, is an archival photograph of Martin Luther King in any way more appropriate to the sale of computers than to any other product? Or consider one of the most talked-about ads of the past year (and a Bronze Clio winner), Volkswagen's "Sunday Afternoon" — more colloquially known, after its soundtrack music, as "Da Da Da" — in which two guys in a car pick up a discarded chair, discover it smells, then discard it again. How exactly does this commercial hawk Volkswagens? (I suppose the two silent characters are driving around in a Volkswagen, but if they weren't I wouldn't notice.) Is there anything, in theory, to prevent this vignette from serving as an ad for any car, or indeed any product at all?

In Leslie Savan's book *The Sponsored Life*, she describes the months of research in 1990 that culminated in the corporate introduction of the "six key adjectives" that best expressed the "brand personality" of Converse athletic shoes: the words were "confident," "genuine," "hard-working," "tough," "unselfish," and "passionate." The relationship between these words and the object they describe, notwithstanding the "research" that went into them, can only be called arbitrary — and such arbitrariness, for advertisers as for the Surrealists, is the governing principle of language. Ever since the days of patent medicine, the common and easy knock against ads has been that they tell lies; and when occasionally a corporation is caught in the lie (as when, for instance, 12,000 gallons of orange juice made from concentrate were confiscated by the FDA because the word "fresh" appeared on the carton), we feel that the wizard has been exposed. But to call a sneaker "unselfish," or even just to propose that putting it on your foot will render you thus, is not a lie exactly; it's more of an uncoupling of the connection between language and reality. The real condition of advertising speech is not falsehood as much as a kind of truthlessness.

The gradual disappearance, then, of products from the commercials that promote them is just a matter of advertising following the logic of its own form. As the relationship between a commodity and its supposed qualities becomes more ethereal, moving from a trumping-up of actual qualities ("helps build strong bodies 12 ways") to wholly invented ones ("Coke adds life"), so the celebration of those particular qualities — heroism for Apple, anomie for Volkswagen — is less and less dependent upon the presence of the commodity itself.

"Physics says," the critic and novelist George Steiner once told an interviewer, "— and I don't understand what



it means but it's lovely — that there is a universe of anti-matter exactly mirroring ours and that when matter and antimatter collide they annihilate each other. I tried to show [in his novel] *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*] that...there was anti-language, that which is transcendently annihilating of truth and meaning." If advertising can be said to do any sort of harm, this notion of anti-language gets at the nature of it. The harm lies not in the ad itself; the harm is in the exchange, in the collision of ad language, ad imagery, with other sorts of language that contend with it in the public realm. When Apple reprints an old photo of Gandhi, or Heineken ends its ads with the words "Seek the Truth," or Winston suggests that we buy cigarettes by proposing (just under the surgeon general's warning) that "You have to appreciate authenticity in all its forms," or Kellogg's identifies itself with the message "Simple Is Good," these occasions color our contact with those words and images in their other, possibly less promotional applications. It's a truism that advertising encroaches upon public discourse by endlessly privatizing every cranny of public space: the sides of school buses, water towers, just above urinals, banana peels, the pages of Iowa's income-tax booklet, even beach sand, which can now be temporarily imprinted with corporate logos. The real violence, though, lies not in the ways in which these messages are forced upon us but in the notion they embody that words can be made to mean anything, which is hard to distinguish from the idea that words mean nothing.

In that same vein it comes as no surprise to learn that the eponymous Clio is not some catchy acronym or some beloved industry figure but is none other than the ancient Greek muse of history and heroic poetry. It's not hard to figure why the show's founders chose forty years ago to hitch their project to Greek mythology for the patina of class and erudition it provides — that's exactly the kind of colonization of value at which advertising excels — but if you wonder whether, by invoking this particular muse, advertisers were also expressing some longing for a sense of historical memory in this most self-effacing of the arts, you're approaching the problem from the wrong angle. The salient fact about Clio in this context is that, of all the muses, she has the shortest name. Just imagine trying to sell the public an awards show called Terpsichores or the Polyhymnias. The reinvented Clio — muse of appropriation, and of the alchemy by which depth is turned to account as surface — turns out to be the perfect muse for advertising after all.

EVERY GENERATION, EVERY SUBCULTURE, has its own icon of misappropriation by the advertising industry: Nike's use of the Beatles' "Revolution," for example, or Munch's "The Scream" reanimated to sell Pontiacs, or Aaron Copland's "Rodeo" used to encourage people to eat more

beef, or Fred Astaire dancing with the vacuum cleaner, or Jack Kerouac posthumously hawking khakis. Sitting in the audience at Alice Tully Hall, I get to feel just that sort of overly personalized cultural despair as I watch the men and women of Wieden & Kennedy walk onstage to accept their honors for the Microsoft campaign built around David Bowie and Brian Eno's brilliant 1977 song "Heroes." The two-note drone and locomotive rhythm of that dirge for individualism in the age of crowds are now employed as the soundtrack for a series of classic capitalist-realist dramas in which various small business owners grow rich by surrendering to the higher will and becoming part of the global fiefdom of Microsoft. The campaign's rapid cuts and elegant visual style win it two Chios for Best Editing.

It's a familiar story: a respected artist who is usually rich already agrees to the recontextualization of his or her work (or image, or voice) in exchange for a bushel of money — Bob Dylan, Spalding Gray, Kurt Vonnegut, Lena Horne, the Pretenders, Beck, Meryl Streep, Maurice Sendak, William Burroughs, Jimmy Stewart, Salvador Dalí, Laurie Anderson, ad infinitum. One imagines that in some cases the culturally sacred character of the work itself is precisely what the artist is pleased to destroy. If the meaning of the work in its original form isn't permanently altered, it certainly experiences a kind of vertigo; I find it hard to imagine, for example, that when Bowie and Eno sat down to write "Heroes" they had in mind the derring-do of venture capitalists. In fact, by using only one line from the song's chorus ("We could be heroes") to accompany what is in effect a series of fables about people who have learned to stop worrying and love monopoly, the ad's makers have attached a meaning to the song something very like the direct opposite of its original meaning. But who cares? One feels like a Puritan for even bringing it up. Sometimes there's a brief and vaguely formulated backlash against the artist (usually focusing on the fact that he or she didn't really need the money anyway); but the outcry passes.

Shouldn't it? Take the case of William Burroughs, who was much vilified for appearing in a Nike ad in 1994. In his eleven novels, Burroughs posited a psychic landscape, as Vince Passaro wrote in the pages of Harper's magazine, in which "the self...become[s] a constant battleground between forces of unseen invasion and occupation and some other force, call it language...that is capable of revealing the invaders and rendering them harmless." For him then to have participated in the assimilation of his voice and his image by a multinational conglomerate, to have lent it his own air of anticorporate subversiveness when in fact nothing could have been less appropriate, less true, was indeed a genuine and shameful public repudiation of everything Burroughs purported to believe in, everything he implicitly asked

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others to value by valuing his work. It should be a source of horror to everyone who admired him.

At the same time, as Burroughs may well have foreseen, the difference between himself and, say, a Douglas Coupland or Julia Alvarez (both of whom have written short stories commissioned to serve as advertisements for Absolut Vodka) is that Burroughs's work was strong enough in the first place to survive all sorts of cultural damage, even the degradations of its own creator. John Dos Passos, to cite a comparable case, wrote the trilogy of novels entitled *U.S.A.* and then spent some thirty years working to disavow the anticapitalist ideals those novels espoused; today, twenty-eight years after Dos Passos's death, *U.S.A.* is one of the supreme achievements of twentieth-century American literature, and its creator's subsequent contradiction of it something like a scholarly footnote.

But what's even more discomfiting than this sort of belated sellout by a cultural hero such as Burroughs or even Bowie is a modern phenomenon exemplified by "Bittersweet Symphony," the debut single by a young British rock band called The Verve. Backed by a hypnotic tape loop of a single musical phrase scored for strings, the song proved popular enough to land The Verve on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine this spring. In the video for the song, lead singer Richard Ashcroft is the picture of rebelliousness, tall, gaunt, fashionably unwashed, walking down a city street unapologetically knocking aside anyone who happens to step in his path. Even while this video, at the apex of its popularity, was still in heavy rotation on MTV, "Bittersweet Symphony" could be heard elsewhere, in another context: as the soundtrack to a Nike commercial.

While it's true that the commercial used only the song's first line ("Cause it's a bittersweet symphony, this life"), editing out the second ("Try to make ends meet, you're a slave to the money, then you die"), in fact such selectiveness hardly matters. Because by establishing this double life for itself — on one channel, it's an expression of defiant nihilism; on another, it's a recommendation to buy sneakers — the song has in effect written its own antilanguage; it has no meaning for them, no substance that a misappropriation might violate. "Bittersweet Symphony" is concerned not with feeling or belief but with the expert simulation of these things. Its audience expects nothing more from it. This is the condition of most contemporary popular art. It has assimilated the sensibility of advertising. As it happens, The Verve themselves have publicly decried this commercialization of their work; indeed, they have gone so far as to donate their Nike fee to charity. Lest we feel too sorry for them, though, the reason the commercial use of "Bittersweet Symphony" is out of their control in the first place is that the song's music — that catchy orches-

tral tape loop — turns out to have been lifted, or "sampled," as the expression goes, from an old album of Rolling Stones music. In the legal bartering that made this permissible, The Verve were in effect disowned by the song that made them famous; virtually from the moment it was composed, "Bittersweet Symphony" was the property of people disinterested in its conception.

Other recent ads have featured the music of bands whose popularity hadn't even advanced as far past the starting line as The Verve — The Crystal Method (Gap), Luscious Jackson (Gap again), and Elastica (Budweiser). The standard model of explanation for this phenomenon in which obscure artists are considered ideal product pitchmen would cite the refinement of the process of co-optation, with the cynical adman hacking his way Marlow-like up the River of Cool in search of the mythical source. But this explanation doesn't account for the eager participation of those being "co-opted." The better explanation is that popular art has come to model itself after advertising in the sense that it can be presumed to have no subject; like advertising, it is now concerned with the appearance of engagement rather than engagement itself.

It wouldn't be accurate to say that these bands have "sold out," because at that early point in their careers they had nothing to sell, no identity to betray — only their fame, which is hardly a principle or a value. Then again, when your work has no content — which is to say, no connection between the language you use and your actual conviction — you have nothing to lose anyway. Consider the case of Emily XYZ, an "underground" poet who was invited by Nike to write a work celebrating one of the female athletes in the 1998 Winter Olympics, with the understanding that this "poem" would constitute the copy for a Nike "commercial film." Up to that point, no one outside of a small circle had heard of her or knew what her work concerned. Now that situation no longer obtains: millions have heard and seen her — she's the poet from the Nike television commercial — and as for what her work concerns, the question is moot, since she has demonstrated that the content of that work is arbitrary; that is, it's for sale.

It's easy, perhaps, to make examples of individual artists without knowing all the circumstances surrounding their decisions. Easy, too, to punish kitsch just for being kitsch: little has changed about the superficiality of most popular art since Clement Greenberg wrote in 1939, "Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations.... Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money — not even their time." But Greenberg also wrote that "the precondition for kitsch... is the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition" whose aesthetic discoveries



kitsch eventually waters down and draws upon. What does that tradition consist of today? Say you're a talented young filmmaker like Kevin Smith (*Clerks*, *Chasing Amy*), who directed two Diet Coke commercials in 1997. Say, hypothetically, that in spite of the siren call of directional fees as high as \$25,000 per day, and of production budgets that work out on average to \$10,000 per second of film (versus the \$5 per second you spent shooting *Clerks*), you're haunted by the specter of artistic compromise. You might then look over your shoulder, figuratively speaking, at the following list of elder directors who also made ads while they were making feature films: Spike Lee, Woody Allen, Adrian Lyne, Ridley Scott, David Lynch, John Frankenheimer, Federico Fellini, Jean-Luc Godard, and on and on. What's "close at hand" for today's younger artists is not the example of a few cynical predecessors, nor a simple and timeworn kitsch sensibility, but the legacy of a corrupted aesthetic: an aesthetic that imagines the separation of form and content is not a renunciatory path to a greater understanding of the processes of art (as it was for Picasso, Mondrian, Pollock, Gertrude Stein) but instead a matter of moral expedience. It's the great Modernist impulse, repeated as farce.

AND IT ECHOES THROUGHOUT all the arts. Pop music, for instance, can hardly be taken to task for shallowness: in the right hands, an affection for surface can be pop's greatest virtue. But how to account for the ascendancy of an artist like Sean Combs, a.k.a. Puff Daddy? Rap artists have always appropriated the work of others in order to put together a kind of sonic pastiche, and the best work of this kind is thrillingly inventive. But Puff Daddy simply *plays* entire songs by other artists (Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir," The Police's "Every Breath You Take") and raps unimaginatively over them, not unlike what many of us might have done in our bedrooms when we were twelve and our parents were out of the house. What's the aesthetic difference between the way a commercial "appropriates" a pop song and the work of Puff Daddy? His is not a recontextualization, not an homage, but a boldly simple confiscation of the work of others as a way of increasing his own value: an advertisement for himself. If you don't watch enough MTV to know how well this strategy has worked for Puff Daddy, ask your children.

Much "highbrow" visual art in our time is art that recontextualizes rather than makes: Rachel Whiteread's water tower, Damien Hirst's dead shark, Jeff Koons's basketball. Smirk if you want at the reputations of Cy Twombly or Jean-Michel Basquiat; at least they were bringing something into the world that wasn't there before, which I would consider a kind of baseline definition for a work of art. But a mattress or a pile of bricks or a suit of clothes on a hanger, placed in a museum with

an artist's credit on a nameplate beside it, feels awfully like the triumph over art of the advertising sensibility: the rapacious, ironic, wholesale appropriation of that which isn't yours as a way of embracing not so much the object's value as your own.

Movies, too, come increasingly to resemble commercials, and not just in the relatively brutish form of "product placement" (a practice that has been around since the 1930s). Anyone who has sat through a blockbuster like *Twister* or *Independence Day* — or, for that matter, well reviewed films like the execrable *Pulp Fiction* or *Boogie Nights* — knows what it is to encounter a work of art with no subject, or whose "subject" (as with the porn industry in *Boogie Nights*) elicits no opinion, no emotional response on the part of the artist: it's simply a pretext for the display of humorous old clothes, vaguely humorous old music, and some nudity. These movies are not just *like* ads; they *are* ads. The product they are selling is themselves.

The clearest expression of this miscegenated aesthetic is MTV, whose "programming" (music videos) consists of advertisements: expensive, creative little films financed by record companies to excite the sales of their real commodity, records. That's not to say music videos are hypocritical, or unenjoyable, or subliminally evil. The practitioners of this relatively new form are not transgressing the presumed boundary between art and advertising: for them, that boundary is simply not there.

AND THE WITHERING AWAY of this aesthetic Berlin Wall is in turn what has unbound, in the last few years, the creative animus of advertising. Previously, commercials were little works of art that aspired to resemble real life; now it is enough that they resemble works of art. Take any of the famous Absolut vodka ads, in which well-known artists (Warhol, Ruscha, Motherwell, etc.) offer their "interpretation" of the familiar bottle design, a campaign that won four Clio's this year. Or Nissan's "Pigeons" spot, an elaborate gag that took home a Clio for the efforts of Hollywood special-effects powerhouse Industrial Light & Magic. Or the stunning 1984-ish production of a current ad for a Reebok running shoe called DMX, which ends with a runner literally bursting through his own skin. The contrast between the artistic brilliance lavished upon these tributes to commodities and the pedestrian nature of the commodities themselves is not an issue to the artists involved: the function of art in advertising, after all, whether original or appropriated, is to inject with value that which intrinsically has no value. The absolute, if superficial, creative freedom this provides is well suited to most of advertising's creators; as E.B. White conjectured years ago, a great deal of the advertising we see every day is a reflection not of scientific business principles but of "the simple desire of



people who write and draw to write and draw." The men and women who make ads are not hucksters; they are artists with nothing to say, and they have found their form.

Still, if there's one moment at Alice Tully Hall when I think I hear the hoofbeats of the horsemen of the cultural apocalypse, it's the screening, toward the end of the evening, of a gorgeous two-minute commercial for the BBC, a Gold Clio winner, entitled "Perfect Day." The ad consists in its entirety, of Lou Reed singing his song of the same name, joined via editing by Elton John, Bono, Tom Jones, Emmylou Harris, Laurie Anderson, David Bowie, Robert Cray, Dr. John, Shane MacGowan, and a dozen others. Reed, an avatar of hip recently anointed by PBS as an "American Master," cheerfully treats his own work like a found object, oblivious to the idea that it had an original intent that might be violated or that the song's integrity, or his own, might be injured by this radical recontextualization. "You're going to reap/Just what you sow," the chorus goes, and as the author of those words goes about proving that they're meaningless to him, I have a feverish feeling of useless passion, something like the feeling you get as a child when you accidentally let go of a balloon and have to watch it disappear.

And I realize why that story of the Clio debacle in 1991 is so satisfying: the thousands of dollars spent on tickets, tuxes, entry fees, and in the end everyone just scrambles onstage and grabs a statue, or a few statues. In a ceremony promising the rigorous judgment of aesthetic success, the prizes wind up being distributed randomly—symbols of excellence, stripped of their relation to that which they symbolize. They should give out the Clios that way every year.

BY THE TIME THE LIGHTS COME UP in Alice Tully Hall, there's no gainsaying Dupuy's analysis; humor was in last year. So what's funny to advertisers? In a word, sincerity: ad after ad functions by creating a kind of straw man of oversincerity whom we can all join in affectionately mocking. Clios go to the creators of the Weather Channel ads wherein weather fanatics with painted faces sit in a "weather bar" and scream like rabid football fans at a TV screen showing temperatures and the movements of warm fronts; the Miller Lite beer ad (one of the series authored by the fictional creative genius "Dick") in which a guy at a chick movie bursts into tears when he drops his beer; the Cartoon Network's "Cartoon Crisis Center," whose staff talks with heart-pounding intensity to animated characters in trouble (to a caller who's suspended in midair after running off the edge of a cliff: "Don't look down...No, I said *don't* look down"); the HBO-obsessed barber who never takes his eyes from the screen, even while cutting hair, so that the whole small town in which he works looks like a collection of circus freaks. I may fetishize my commodities, one imagines

the viewer of these ads saying, but at least I'm not as bad as *that* guy.

To their credit, advertisers don't exempt themselves from these cartoons of earnestness. The funniest ads of the evening are those that mock their own purposes. A commercial for Mizuno running shoes purports to settle the question of which shoe is better, Mizuno or Nike, by putting the former on the right foot of a sprinter and the latter on the left. With each stride, the announcer intones quickly and with gravity, "Mizuno in the lead. Nike in the lead. Mizuno in the lead..." As the sprinter's right foot crosses the finish line first, the announcer says, "Mizuno is the winner. Nike is last." An even more amusing spot for the fast-food chain Jack in the Box opens with a man wearing the restaurant's familiar giant puppet head knocking on the door of a stereotypical surfer dude and saying he'd heard that the surfer had been referring to the restaurant as "Junk in the Box." As the surfer tries to slam the door on him, the puppet-head kicks it open, chases the man through his house and into the yard (followed by a *Cops*-style handheld camera), tackles him, force-feeds him the new improved Jack in the Box burger and fries, and literally beats a testimonial out of him. This disarming bit of self-burlesque got the most sustained applause of the night.

It's a great joke, all right; but how long will it stay funny? Debate over whether or not advertising is an art amounts to little more than squeamishness. Vacuous, fundamentally compromised, advertising is nevertheless America's most ascendant homegrown influence on the aesthetic legacy of this century. Like any art, it follows the internal logic of its own historical development; and the problem confronting it, at the apex of its effectiveness, is the same problem that confronts literature, painting, music: is there no such thing as a terminal point for irony? The notion that irony is approaching a kind of critical mass in our culture has led some young artists to wonder mutinously about the hipness of insincerity. The subversive deadpan that powered great art by Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Coover and the Talking Heads has withered into a cultural reflex, a complicity: the smirk of ironic disengagement exchanged between artist and audience now refers to nothing but itself, like two mirrors held face to face. Might the next few years see the advent of a more principled, unhedged, lyrical, daringly guileless sort of art?

Should that day come, advertising will, no doubt, learn to simulate those qualities just as well as it simulates anything else. But perhaps when it does it will look more openly—even to its practitioners—like the unsmiling propaganda it has always constituted, never more than in its most cheerfully ironic hour.

TARZANA

Narrow

Wide

TARZANA Narrow Regular
 TARZANA Narrow Bold
 TARZANA Narrow Italic
 TARZANA Narrow Bold Italic
 TARZANA Wide Regular
 TARZANA Wide Bold
 TARZANA Wide Italic
 TARZANA Wide Bold Italic

8 FONTS
\$159

For a full showing of Tarzana, see Emigre magazine, issue #47.



EMIGRE

UNTITLED II

Emigre #48 (Untitled II): Mother Jones magazine recently decided to upgrade their image and Emigre gets the inside scoop on the pontics of the redesign from art director Rhonda Rubinstein. Then, graphic designer Stuart Bailey allows us a peek behind the scenes in the creation of the "Workplaats Typografie," a brand new experimental graduate design program based in Arnhem, Holland. Also, Kenneth FitzGerald, in his essay "Skillful Saws and Absorbent Catalogs," points out how art and design have come to rely on each other, and how graphic designers may learn from the symbiosis. And, enclosed as a special 32-page addendum, is "A Brief History of Type Design at The Apollo Program." This type specimen booklet introduces seven new fonts (shown on left), all of which were produced and designed by Elliott Peter Earls and are made available exclusively through Emigre Fonts.

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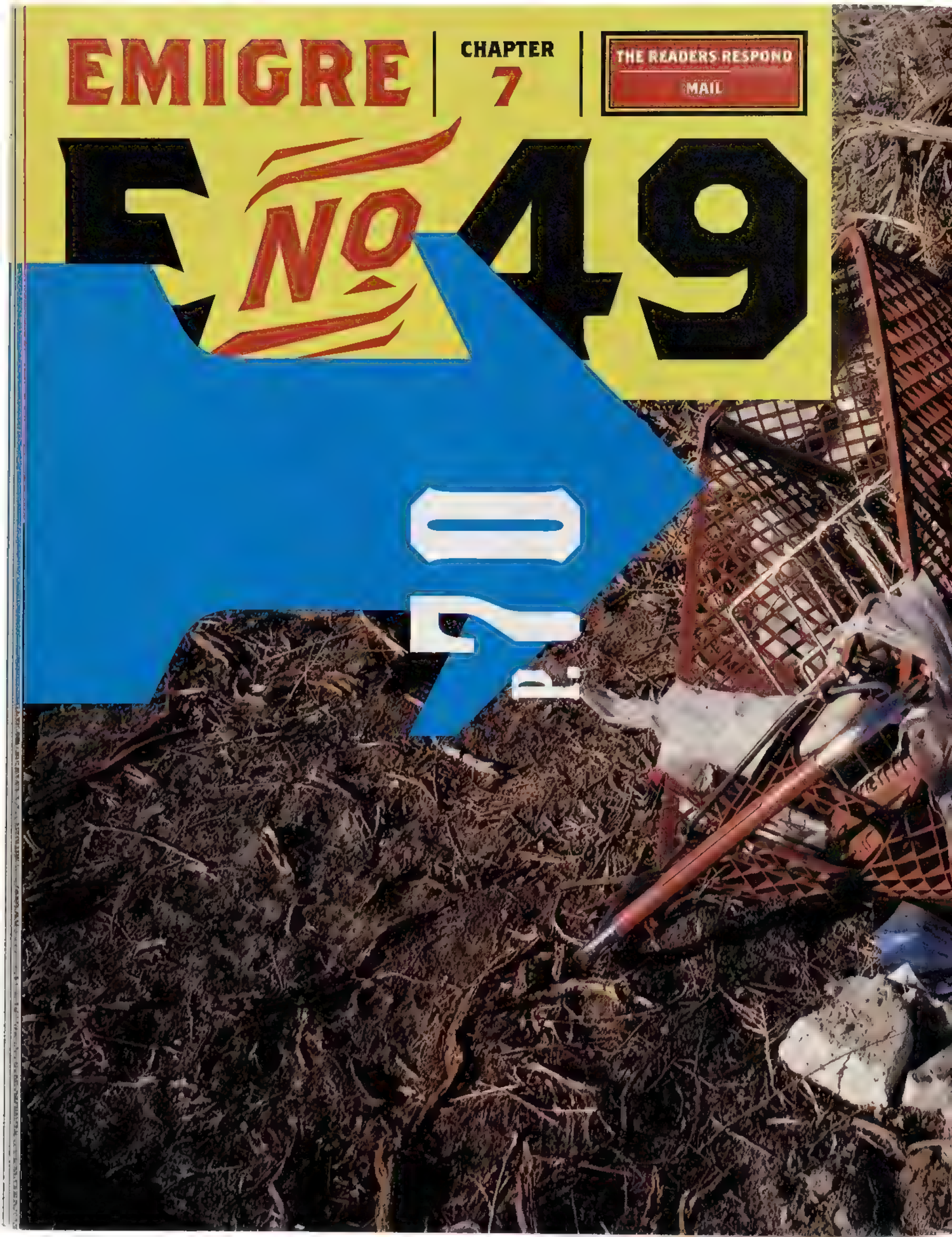
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THE READERS RESPOND

MAIL

NO 49

OF





THE REMOVERS RESPOND

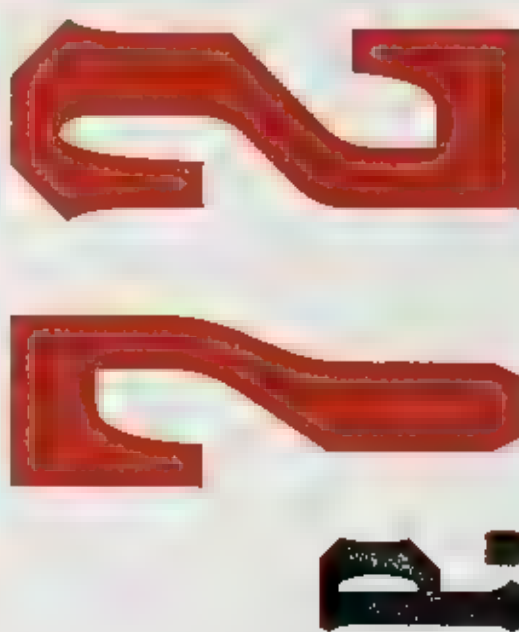
DEAR EMIGRE. As one who attempts to ride that trusty fence meant to separate art from design, I read Kenneth Fitzgerald's article "Skilling Saws And Absorbent Catalogs" (*Emigre* 48) with great interest. As with the roach motel, penetrating Fitzgerald's brilliant and enlightening text was almost too easy. But soon enough a creeping discomfort seized me. I felt the foundations that my dual creative life is built on begin to bubble up and melt my shoes. I was stuck, twisting in place while the author's sweeping indictment of both designers and artists administered a double-tall, long-overdue pistol-whipping I'll not soon forget. (By the time I realized I ought to put the magazine down and flee the building it was of course too late.)

Fitzgerald's article flatly states that artists who think they "answer only to their muse" are deluding themselves. It is impossible, he asserts, to make art or be an artist outside of our pervasive commercial system. This system holds the commodity up as the ultimate litmus by which everything of value is, supposedly, measured. To quote Ned Beatty from the film *Network*, this is simply "how things work today," same as they did in centuries past, apparently. ("Art was born of the marketplace, as was design. Design was merely a new product line.") This system's value-based standard of measure is the means by which we determine what's worth our while and it is our justification for offhandedly disregarding anything we can find no immediate use for. Fitzgerald claims that this holds just as true for our fine art showrooms as it does for Walmart and he's no doubt right. In a 100% consumer society like ours, commodities are the "stuff of life" to the extent that, as Fitzgerald suggests, we cannot even regard a thing or a person until he/she/it exhibits some measure of trade value. To make matters worse (or perhaps to exemplify this, to "be somebody"), we ourselves forge our very identities out of cobbled together conglomerations of prefab consumer choices (say it with me): selecting this label, deselecting that label, putting this product in us, putting that product on us. In this way, and in transcendental terms (swoosh!) that have no use for language let alone ideas, we decide "who" we're going to be. And when we have occasion to rail against the mass-produced urge to buy, even *that* choice (the "choice not to choose" ... to abstain, to strike the Rebel Nonconsumer pose) still identifies us in terms of a larger unassailable consumerist framework. After all, even a supposed nonconsumer can only be identified and rec-

ognized as such against a backdrop of ambient consumerism. And the same holds true for artists, no matter how subversive or "rule-breaking" they attempt to be.

I got my start as a designer around 1985. One of my first full-time jobs was designing point-of sale materials, brand labeling and merchandise graphics for a national chain of apparel outlets. In terms of trade value, my work paid well and the products of my labor were in steady demand in shopping malls across the country. But no matter how immersed I was in work, no matter how many hours a week I spent at the office, no matter how well I performed, the part of me that might have cared was sealed outside of this closed loop of Commerce. My work life felt "uncreative," empty and meaningless. In my private life I felt time-poor, scarcely able to make full use of what free time was left to me. It was the zenith of the late 80s economic boom and the company in question was experiencing freakish profits. I should have been enjoying myself, right? Perhaps it was an ill-timed bout of conscience. I nevertheless found myself wanting more, wanting to make art that defied commodification. Of course I didn't think about it specifically in those terms. In those days I just squirmed uncomfortably behind cubicle walls, gnashing my teeth, harboring a nagging concern over the fact that the frivolous work I was engaged in was just so much window dressing. I felt ashamed that this was how I was spending my life. Not that I had delusions of grandeur any greater than the next guy's. I surely didn't consider myself an artist at that point, not per se. But I definitely felt a desire to do something more meaningful (and therefore more satisfying) with my time and creative energy. I initially selected design as a career over art primarily because I could foresee making a living at design. Art required one to take a vow of poverty, right? I was discovering, though, that design, as a kind of art practice, was fundamentally unsatisfying.

A step in the right direction was to move away from what I considered "surface decoration." I would focus instead on substance: "the product itself," ostensibly. Mind you, I had no product in the usual sense of the word. But I soon realized I wouldn't need one. As far as I can tell, it was around that time that the artist woke up in me: green, clueless, bent on subverting and devaluing the designer (who kept his job, for now). My artist would employ the designer's tricks, but through the white magic of "détournement" — Guy Debord's term for the



alchemy by which an artist makes art that questions art's function as spectacle/commodity — I would set about redirecting my creative energy and my life. It was a motion in favor of art, but more importantly it was a turning away from mundane design concerns and even esthetic concerns for that matter, in favor of "pure research" (reading books mostly) and experimentation. Around that time I drew dumb, unpublishable comics (pursuing a personal agenda...on company time) on the subject of branding, of all things (a universal, impersonal agenda)! These comics starred myself plus some friends with whom I'd recently formed a pop band. These self-indulgent ball-point scribblings held positively no meaning for anyone but us, but unlike anything else I had produced up until that point in my young life, these comics felt vaguely like Art! With these same people I produced a zine which, at the peak of its form, aspired primarily to vex, to be (out of sheer spite) something refreshingly pointless, deliberately uncommodifiable, perishable, its own dead end. "An advertisement for its own future uselessness" as we sometimes referred to it. Therein would lie its charm and appeal and, most importantly, its peculiar use to me. As part of this little exercise in futility, we even went so far as to deliberately misspell the zine's name, *in the masthead*.

I would remain stubbornly unaware of Debord's writings for another eight years, but this scandalous misspelling of our own masthead was a pivotal act of "negation" that would inform my later "fine art" works.

Today I earn my keep primarily as a one person design shop (i.e., Shawn Wolfe Company). I've learned that a corporate hive is no place for me to spend my days but I've also learned that the machineries of commerce that I cut my teeth on and railed against then (against which I continue to rail) are nothing less than a force of nature. I think I've made my peace with this unpleasant fact of life. (Tragically, Debord would succeed in shooting himself through the heart before I even had a chance to call it by its given name, "The Spectacle.") I still lead the double life of the artist/designer and, as Fitzgerald's article patiently points out, I am no closer than anyone else to leaving or sealing out the atmosphere of the global marketplace. And "Skilling Saws And Absorbent Catalogs" gives me fresh reason to fear that a person who hedges and leads such a dual existence for too long might, if he's not careful, end up being reviled by both the art camp *and* the design community.

I never gave these muddled issues too much thought until now. I was aware of them, but with scant hope of resolving anything single-handedly, I never took on the task of sorting through it all. My fine art behaviors are resorted to because commercial art behaviors, for me, are confined to trade, craft and style. As a designer I have tried to concentrate my focus on craft as much as possi-

ble, eschewing fashionable design sauces (and theories certainly) as much as I can while still remaining a commercially viable talent. Fine art continues to be the creative and ideative free range that design is not. If, when I change hats, I am only, as Fitzgerald insists, deselecting "Marketplace D" in favor of "Marketplace A," I'd like to say in my defense that I have until now harbored rather conservative expectations as to what my "return" might be in the latter. (My rationales are surely "secondary at best," as Mr. Fitzgerald so mildly puts it. Of course I am more than willing to be part of any and all canons just as every other art-maker of this century has been. Who wouldn't be?) My artwork meanwhile has held a steady value for me and has moreover held meaning for me when it was lacking elsewhere. Were it not for that, I likely would never have bothered with it in the first place. Graphic design, after all, is a much more bankable vocation. In that sense my artworks, slick and calculated as they may be, have been created out of impulse, usually only when I felt it was necessary, and ultimately to gratify a terminally malcontented designer.

Regards,

SHAWN WOLFE, SEATTLE, WA, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. Michael Shea, in the interview in *Emigre* 47, described Nick Udall's triangle of client/purpose, design process/meaning, and consumer/markets, in which the client's purpose is communicated by the designer through the product. I think this touches on an essential point: that we, as a public, largely perceive a company through its printed matter and manufactured products. Except for service companies, we probably never have direct contact with any employees of the company. So how else will the purpose be communicated except through artifacts?

This reminds me of a diagram devised by sociologist Wendy Griswold that she calls the "context diamond," and which, being an industrial designer, I've been adapting to product development. The four points of the diamond are (clockwise from 9 o'clock): creator, socio-cultural world, user, and product. The designer has to take all of these aspects into consideration when working, balancing them and playing them off against one another.

Within each of these four domains can lie many elements. On the creator side can be management, marketing, the designer (graphic or industrial), project brief, company vision, and company history and individual's memories and perspectives drawn from it. On the user side there are users that are known and unknown to the creator(s), and users who are currently customers of the company or might be in the future. There are also "onlookers"—people who might not actually use the product but who might influence its development through

the socio-cultural world. (Ralph Nader, for example, never drove a Corvair, but influenced other cars through the legal system.) The product node can contain the final product itself, be it 2-D or 3-D, as well as prototypes or comps, and probably an overall marketing campaign. These items are all touched on by Udall's formulation.

The part that he does not really seem to address in detail is the socio-cultural world. This is the realm of cultural predilections and history, of economics, of competing companies. They play a pivotal, though often unacknowledged role, in pushing companies in certain directions with their products. What is interesting, however, is to look at how the lines of influences in this diamond are directed, because what we find is a mish-mash of forces.

The socio-cultural world is largely a one-way push on the creator, who has very little power to influence the institutions, mentalities, and other entities contained within it. The creator and product nodes bidirectionally influence each other. The creator obviously makes the product, but the product can push back (this is part of the creative process, no? To make something unexpected.) The product also influences the users, and does so unidirectionally. (In fact, as mentioned earlier, companies have no direct influence on the users, but must go through the product node to achieve it.) Users also have no direct influence over the development of the products.

What about focus groups and marketing surveys, you might ask? They involve the users, but do so in a highly filtered manner. What one finds is that there is a "distorting lens" set up between the socio-cultural world and the product that alters how the creators interpret the users. Cultural biases and knowledge of the product being worked on cause us to ask certain questions of users, and to interpret their answers in biased ways. In addition, company history and individual experiences on the creator side cause further interpretive shifts. I would agree with anthropologist Clifford Geertz that these effects can to a certain extent be minimized, but never eliminated.

Does this mean you should give up on asking users? No. As Geertz says, "It is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something." But as Michael Shea says, many companies and designers do not even make the first attempt to go out and talk to users. I certainly agree that this is a major problem. I think Michael is probably correct in attributing it to a type of contempt, though being an industrial designer I can't really speak for graphic designers. Designers in general, though, have evolved a (rather crude) language for describing what we do and how we do it, and I think we tend to look down on people who try to tell us about their experiences with our work without using that language.

I thought it was interesting that Michael and

Lorraine Wild's articles book-ended that issue of *Emigre*. She was commenting in part on how she sees a strand of practice pushing designers to be anthropologists, which she perceives as getting designers away from what they fundamentally do: form-making. Obviously I don't see this as being necessarily true, though it certainly does shift the knowledge base that designers must possess. I think industrial designers have moved a bit further along in this continuum than graphic designers, with some firms even having anthropologists and ethnographers on staff.

Why are we so afraid of talking to users? I think the question that was put to Michael hits it on the head: "Are you not afraid that when you give equal power to all three [client, designer, user] that the resulting compromise will generate bland results?" I think Michael's response emphasizing equal respect over equal power was exactly right. As Michael says, we take their input, interpret it in ways we deem appropriate, and respond.

Unfortunately, I don't see a lot of designers wanting to give equal respect to users and their clients. I think this springs from two sources: power and fear. Fear because design (graphic and industrial both) is rarely deemed a "necessary" component of business, therefore designers are in a constant state of having to justify their existence. How to do this in the language of business — numbers — of course remains an enduring problem.

Power comes into play when a designer is hired by a client who does see, if only partially or contingently, the value in design. Here a simple equation demonstrates the power structure: CREATIVITY = COMMODITY = MYSTERY = POWER. When a designer sees that they have a commodity — creativity — that is in demand, it is in their interest to keep it mysterious and unlearnable by the client. That way, the designer maintains some modicum of power over the client.

I think the current lean 'n' mean business climate that Wild laments is testimony to the fact that you can only carry this equation for so long, and then clients really do start looking for justification. It's all well and good to say that clients who just trust designers to do their thing are the "enlightened" ones, but if we as a profession can't justify our existence to the people who are paying us to exist, then there's a major problem. Our reluctance to talk to users about how they see our work is a component of this. Are we afraid they won't like it or understand it? That it didn't have any affect on their perception of the company or, worse, harmed it? To analogize, would you trust a surgeon with your body if he'd never bothered to check whether any of his patients survived? Michael's description of design competitions and annuals holds true for *I.D.* also: they do little to inform non-designers how we work, what our goals are, what the design process is, etc. (I would throw most

museum shows in here also.)

Finally, I was glad Michael closed on this issue of certification and justifying our professional existence to those outside design. As critic Bruce Robbins has said, history has shown that professions that fail to justify their existence to society eventually falter and disappear. For better or for worse, we have to explain ourselves in terms that the listeners — companies — understand, which is a task designers have neither been educated for nor seem willing to undertake.

ADAM RICHARDSON, SENIOR DESIGN ASSOCIATE,
PRAXIS PRODUCT DESIGN, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. I applaud Kenneth FitzGerald for his insightfully intelligent and convincing essay "Skillings Saws and Absorbent Catalogs," *Emigre* #48. In it, Mr. FitzGerald factually portrays the much maligned real life relationship between the famously jealous, bickering siblings Art and Design.

Let's stop all the posturing and face it, Art and Design are cut from the same bolt of cloth. Consider this: Two siblings enter a college art foundation program. After two semesters of the prerequisite painting, drawing, form study, design and media arts courses, one sibling emerges electing Art as a major, and the other sibling chooses Design. Happens all the time. Simple, you might think. Not quite. The sibling who chooses Design as a major will ultimately be made to feel they have made a bad choice. And why is that? Because they sold out.

Mr. FitzGerald makes a solid argument citing some interesting tidbits of (constructed) art history to help dispel the myth of the artist, you know, the noble savage who works alone in his/her garret. Anyone who is even vaguely familiar with the business of art is quite aware that successful artists employ many assistants to keep up the demand for their work. Small precious works have now been replaced by large, room-size installations and the like.

And what of the unsuccessful legions who have no assistants, no commissions or installations? Chances are the smart ones learned computer graphics and have jobs during the week, or are gainfully employed waiting tables. A real romantic reality, don't you think?

It is precisely through a folly of cultural amnesia that our society continues to believe in this art myth. Why is it so important to our culture that we collectively believe artists of our glorious past worked any differently? These artists worked on commissions (read: art for hire) in order to earn their living and feed their families. They were paid to construct biblical scenes for churches and chapels, to paint portraits of aristocracy and nobility to grace the castle walls, to sculpt large monuments dedicated to the ennobled in every society. All

paying gigs.

When Mr. FitzGerald states: "Artists thrive on the avant-garde notion that it is their role to critique and experiment with cultural forms. A designer investigating these ideas is an offense against sensibility, against the cultural order." Is this a bunch of stupid posturing or what?

Creativity knows no bounds, nor should it. Why should any creative person be limited to one form or the other?

ELIZABETH RESNICK, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF GRAPHIC
DESIGN, MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF ART, BOSTON, MA

DEAR EMIGRE. Just got issue 48, and it reminded me that I still hadn't responded to issue 47. I'll try to hit 'em both in one shot.

I really liked Mr. Keedy's article in the last issue. He seems to have a refreshingly sober and honest view of things after seeing his own work degenerate from "deconstructed, confrontational design" to banal novelty. Seems to me that he's in the wrong line of work, that he's secretly a postmodern artist who uses typography as his medium, but his work was discovered (to his horror) by people who use it to sell things.

He (and a lot of other designers who appear in/read your magazine) would probably be a lot happier working as fine artists, as long as they could handle the pay cut. Fine art is all about commenting on society, doing edgy work, assaulting people's expectations, making people think. There is an audience for postmodernism, but it's generally not large enough to make a living off of.

My educational background is in fine art, but I became a designer after school because I wanted to have a family and eat three meals a day. I definitely appreciate *Emigre* for publishing the work of people working on the fringe. I love "High Five" web sites and David Carson as much as anybody, but my day-to-day work is about doing what the client wants, not about "resisting mainstream pop banality."

On that note, I loved your defense of the *Emigre* web site in issue 48. Great design is a lot more than decoration, it should aid in getting the job done, whatever the job is. For those of us with a grasp on the real world, the job primarily revolves around making a living.

I also liked Rhonda Rubinstein's article about her work at *Mother Jones*. Her account of how she preached the gospel of Alternative Modernism to a bunch of suits in a glass-walled conference room decorated with awards was stirring! It reminded me of another important aspect of design that many designers loathe: sales. Given, that's a nasty word to many artsy types, but sales accompanied by true conviction can be inspiring.

Thanks! Keep up the good work.

CLARKE ROBINSON, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. After reading and rereading the last few issues of *Emigre*, I've become increasingly irritated at the notion that graphic design is in the midst of a bland period. As a professional graphic designer, may I be the first one to say, "Thank you very little." In some of your more recent issues, especially the introductions in issues 45 and 47, there is this overwhelming noise I hear in the background that sounds quite a bit like my seven-year-old cousin. It's called whining, dear boy, and I'm getting sick of it. While y'all have been berating the state of our industry, I've seen some pretty great stuff produced. And I, myself, have produced some things that I'm pretty proud of. And I bet if you ask some other designers what they think, they'll probably tell you that they are doing their best to create good work, solve client problems and put some food on the table at the end of the day.

You know, there's another issue at hand here, and that is this: you run a design magazine. You have the means and ability (and might I say the responsibility) to be the beacon of light, as you were when you started this magazine way back when. Remember that? Remember how fun it was to take a swing at the big boys and keep coming back with new, exciting and inspiring writing and graphic design?

I'll tell you what. I (like most designers out there) have good clients and bad clients. We win some battles and we lose some. Usually we produce some pretty exciting things, and occasionally we blow our minds with some really cool stuff. Hey, I like what I do. It's great to do something this creative, that feeds on ideas and ingenuity. It's not perfect, and it sure doesn't pay enough. But if you think what we do just isn't up to your standards, let's do this: you come here and take my place for a month. You do my work and pay my rent and deal with my student loans and hospital bills, and let me run a magazine where I can do whatever I want with it. I'm not saying what you do is easy, but don't tell me what I do isn't inspiring to you and your minions anymore.

With love,

KEITH BROWN, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. Wow! Thirteen pages of "The Readers Respond." While a number of interesting points are made, I have to say the increasing number of hostile and aggressive voices in the design field is a disappointment and unnecessary to intelligent critical discourse. I liken it to the kind of narrow mindedness that results in bar-room brawls. For the sake of perspective (and at the risk of becoming part of the brawl), I'd like to throw my drink in some faces.

Like all aggression, I'm sure these hearty backlashes are rooted in fear. While we are all curious about the future of design, it seems that many designers are panicked; terrified by the uncertainty of it. (Designers must



be right up there with senior citizens when it comes to conservative investing!) I get the impression that a lot of designers are waiting to find out what they should do...

DESIGN!

Correct me if I'm wrong, but *Emigre* is a forum, not a "How-To" manual or textbook for "The Next Big Thing." Perhaps the voices that bemoan *Emigre*'s move toward printing "too much theory - not enough design" are simply missing the old days where they could rely on the latest issue for lots of "new ideas" (read: other folks' new ideas to "show them the way").

It just gets tiring to hear/read so much complaining about design, as if it were a third party acting entirely of its own accord, as if it had nothing to do with the designer as an individual. Maybe if all the designers stopped looking around at all the other designers, and just focused on being brilliant, they wouldn't find so much to complain about. Maybe then we could all feel comfortable about the future of design, and it wouldn't be such a scary place.

Just keep designing!

Do it because you love to do it!

Who's stopping you, and what are you waiting for?!

Success and self-confidence are results of being good at what you do, and being true to yourself as a creative individual, not from being a member of the next cool design movement. Be your own damn design movement.

(For those in fear, perhaps a Design Meditation Mantra would be helpful: "I am a good designer. I am not afraid. I will design. I will design well." Deep breaths, everyone, and really feel it as you recite the words in your head...)

Sincerely,

E DAGGAR, BROOKLYN, NY

P.S. - I wholeheartedly applaud (and agree with) the really smart defense presented for the *Emigre* web site. Good stuff

DEAR EMIGRE. I was intrigued by the criticism of your web site heading the introduction to *Emigre* #48. I have used your web site several times and never been disturbed by the lack of "cool" design tricks (actually, I've been relieved by it). The home page downloads in well under a minute, the information is easily accessible, and the user is never asked to download any stupid plug-ins to view the site. These are all signs of good web page design. Also, it is one of the most content-rich commercial sites I've come across.

This is where you break the one sacred commandment of web page design: "Thou shalt not scroll." Which is a ridiculous rule anyway, considering one of the best uses for web research. A more appropriate rule is "Think first, design later."

For *Emigre*, a text-heavy site is entirely appropriate. The attention deficit three year-olds whom the no scrolling rule was intended for probably won't be lining

up to read Emigre any time soon.

Instead of just surfing the web for cool design, designers need to really use it — be frustrated by it. Design should make information accessible to the world, a task that most web design does very poorly right now. Finding desired information on the web is nearly impossible, especially when sites take twenty minutes to come up, then expect the user to spend another hour downloading and installing plug-ins.

Designers should work within the constraints of the medium to relieve these problems, not get so carried away with the glitz and cheap tricks that we further contribute to the problem. The focus of Internet design should be to create a space where users can find information that is meaningful to them, and fast.

Now the Internet is new, but once the novelty of it wears off, what happens? Most people won't even sit through the commercials on tv, so why should we expect them to seek out commercials on the web?

Emigre's web site is very usable and informative, it should be an example to Internet designers.

Sincerely,

KATIE SCHUMACK, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. I'm writing a dissertation on the subject of the influence of (computer) technology on graphic design, and one of the chapters talks about *Emigre*. Initially, I visited your web site in hope of finding some more recent information on the circulation of *Emigre* (the most recent figure I had was about 7,000, dating back to 1994).

It may come as a surprise to you (I don't know), it certainly did to me, but it was my first visit to the site, and a very memorable one too. For a "magazine that ignores boundaries," *Emigre* has come a long way to become just another money-spinning enterprise (or so it seems). A longer look at the web site shows *Emigre* to be a Disneyland for adults (or should I say, designers?). Buy Emigre T-shirts, Emigre posters, Emigre music, Emigre pajamas (?!), Emigre vases...

What happened to the great Emigre ideology? Fair enough, you (here I mean Licko and VanderLans) had to sell something to make money. In the beginning it was your own work and ideology, then came the typefaces — but mouse-pads? Have you grown tired of "challenging boundaries" and decided that it's better to make some money and get out before you're too old and Emigre has become old-fashioned? After all, can you still be groundbreaking when running along for almost fifteen years whistling different versions of the same tune?

Well, you may have guessed I am not an Emigre fan, but neither am I radically opposed to it. You could say I am rather amused and fascinated by all the fuss about Emigre that is still going on. Therefore my great aston-

ishment at what the Emigre web site is — a bit like making the "great Emigre style" available to the masses. It seems as though Emigre survives nowadays more through its (well established) name than its supposedly radical approach to design — maybe after fifteen years the novelty has finally worn off.

Hmm, maybe design is not such a good idea.

Thank You.

VESNA ANIC, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. I read the *Emigre* "Fanzine" [#46] issue cover to cover. At first I was shocked (as in upset) that you would consider *Emigre* a fanzine. After all, it has always seemed highbrow and has catered to, or at least been consumed by, the elite of the graphic design community that almost exclusively meant "non-working-class," successful (dare I say yuppie?) designers. But after reading your editorial again, I had to reconsider. After all, how can you help it if the subject you are passionate about (an absolute requirement of zinedom) appeals to a "higher" end clientele?

Emigre has apparently always sought to expose under-publicized designers. Always followed your singular vision of quality design and has always been, until now, subscriber-driven.

So I guess *Emigre* is a zine (or at least was?). Thanks for publishing such a high quality zine and I have no regrets about your new choice of direction (size, stock, adverts, circulation). As a publisher I also affirm your current dilemma of text vs. design and white space.

OTTO VON STROHEIM, Tiki News, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

DEAR EMIGRE. Issue 48 was the worst ever!!!

SARAH CONNER, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. I have never read anything in your magazine as stupid as the letter by Caliban Tiresias Darlock [*Emigre* #48]. I'm not sure which is worse, watching 60 minutes broadcast the death of a suffering human being or you publishing the rantings of a simple minded person like Caliban.

Not everyone can read *Ulysses* and if they could, then they be a better man than I and probably most other people on this small planet. All works of James Joyce should be attempted to be read not only for their historic importance but also for the experience. I'm not sure of the best way to explain the rhyme and reason of the way he writes, but from my perspective, when a person does get through a paragraph or even a book of his, they learn to appreciate a new sense of story telling that puts the reader right in the path of the author's reality by the way he communicates his characters' awareness of their environments.

I figure if I can understand what's going on in one of James Joyce's books, then I can appreciate design of



at least the last 100 years or so. And I never had to once lament the downfall of a magazine as "subversive" as *Wired* or maybe the demise of *Electronic Gaming*. But I'm sure if I didn't have to always be re-reading James Joyce's books I would have had the time to do so.

JOHN MACIA, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. Hello, just a quick note regarding your web site. It's one of the best I have ever used! Whoever was complaining in E.48 is *insane*!

I judge a site almost entirely by *speed*. This is fast, attractive and easy to navigate.

Keep up the great work

ERIC LEWIS, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. I think "Dismantling Design" would've been a better title for issue #47.

Congratulations on putting together an issue where the pictures said more than the words. The photographs on pages 1-15 and 60-68 served to expose the soulless, sterile, dead world that all graphic designers are complicit in creating. Lorraine Wild's talk of "resistance" was absurd juxtaposed in the same issue with the disgusting images of Sacramento's palm trees, hills, and blue skies blotted out by the metastasizing cancer of advertisements provided by our booming capitalist economy. Designers are specialists in the true McLuhan sense of the word: those who make no small mistakes while working towards the larger fallacy. Even the average *Adbusters* subscriber will tell you what is now plainly obvious: the Global Economy is a death machine. To nit-pick over typefaces and the role of "chance" in design while strip malls, parking lots, sweatshops, and landfills expand across our dying planet is laughable; to brag about using recycled paper in a magazine committed to propagating "visual diversity" while we lose thousands of living species a year is downright sad. Designers are just another cog in the wheel: they put a pretty face on the implements of our impending extinction. Wild talks about salvaging "graphic design in the face of the juggernaut of technology and the demands of the market," but design is the face of the juggernaut! It is very low on the list of things that need to be salvaged in this inchoate Age of Emergency.

You pride yourselves on critical thinking in design, so why not go a step further and critique the obvious: design itself. The unexamined life is not worth living.... What exactly are designers participating in?

Sincerely,

LUTHER BLISSETT, BUFFALO, NY

DEAR EMIGRE. I've got a name for the *Emigre* 48: The designer's whine, bitch and maybe cry a little issue. Man, what's up? I started to read this issue and was so bored

with all the boo hooing over the current state of graphic design I had to chuck it. Do we really have it that bad? I mean, we could wake up one morning all magically transformed into telephone solicitors or IRS auditors — then we could talk about how bad off our profession is.

Of course, there are problems with our profession, but what profession doesn't have its dark side? It's a job and sometimes work sucks, but compared to what the rest of the world is doing for a living we've got it made. Ditch all the negative vibes. You guys used to be the light at the end of the tunnel — now it's a place for designers to hop a ride on the bitter bus.

CHRIS LINDER, A DESIGNER, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. I just wanted to say something in response to the "your web site sucks" letter that the editor (or whomever) responded to. I remember that IBM commercial with the flames and the uninterested corporate guy and disappointed graphic designers. I love that commercial.

Simplicity is a wonderful thing. I enjoy the fact that *emigre.com* shows off the work of the font designers, instead of touting whatever graphic skills those of you behind *emigre.com* may or may not have (as the case may be). There's my two cents.

SARA, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. After reading your editorial in #47 I realized that what you experienced and shared with us, all designers (or all people) experience. Few share it with the world (except on their personal web sites, which we know are lies) and I wanted to say thanks for *Emigre*, without which the overeducated and understimulated spoiled brat readers would have to send their letters to *CA* magazine (or *Graphis*!). Mostly, I wanted to respond to Kelli Miller's letter in #48.

Kelli, stop sucking your thumb and pouting and come out and play. What we want from you (and all you other people who design) is good design. Design is what communication looks like. Good design looks and communicates better than the other stuff, the crap. Great design is singular. An impeccably organized diagram that helps engineers and mechanics learn something about a screw (see *Envisioning Information* by Edward R. Tufte); the surprising juxtaposition of images and text (see the work of Henry Wolf, Michael Bierut); the treatment (and editing) of text relevant to its content and context (Tibor Kalman) is what really good design is about. (What? Not enough time? They don't pay you enough? Clients are assholes? Oh boo hoo, this artsy stuff ain't so much fun after all, is it?)

What design isn't about is following in footsteps, however much admired, or about looking cool (we all look cool automatically, it's our business). Stop reading

criticism and theory, looking through annuals and listening to cynics (especially aging cynics) and notice all the inadequate, unappealing, annoying, wasted communication around (most of it done by aging cynics and talent-less technicians) and think of how you would change it to make it your way, the way you think it would be better (not hipper, or edgier, or controversial-er. Better). Your own way. You.

Join the cult of the individual. Everything we do is bleeding-edge, one-of-a-kind.

JOHN NAPOLITANO, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. Loved your response on the "Ugly Emigre web site" backlash. I believe your site to be an excellent example of letting function come before form when appropriate. Too many designers think that form should *always* come first and forget the real purpose of their job. And function aside, I think your site is visually gorgeous; following the style that Emigre sets in its print materials: clean, pure and unique.

DON BUTTON, CREATIVE DIRECTOR,

SACRAMENTO NEWS & REVIEW, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. I have just finished the gorgeously designed catalog you just sent me and I am struck by all the negative email about the emigre web design. Maybe 10,434 people will say this but I think that even though your web site is fully functional, which is an amazing feat – I know from experience how easy CGI can crash – but the design is still rather restrained. It's not even restrained in a way that looks intentional. Only two colors? And such non colors! What about a little more type treatment, come on! Why can't the web site have a "little" of the great far out flavor of the printed catalog? Okay I'm done.

BENJAMIN SEAMAN, GRAPHIC DESIGNER,

NEW YORK CITY, NY, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. I've just finished reading "Typo Anarchy," by Teal Triggs (*Emigre* #46), and I ask: why do you only mention Jamie Reid twice? His influence was essential! He was one of the most subversive artists of the Punk movement. And even today, 20 years later, his work is unique. He needs a special issue to himself.

LUCAS PABLO LÓPEZ, PUMP DESIGN STUDIO, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA, INTERNET

"God save Jamie, he is a talented being..."

DEAR EMIGRE. I found Kenneth Fitzgerald's article "Skill-ing Saws and Absorbent Catalogs" to be a must read for any designer. It offers a great alternative to the way that most designers have been taught to think about art. Though I agree almost entirely with the article, I did want to mention something that bothered me. I find a problem with the concept of a progressive history put forth

in this article.

When considering how designers relate to art history and practices, Kenneth Fitzgerald writes: "When referring to art, designers usually settle in one of two historical eras. For those of a more *traditional* bent, nothing seems to have happened in art – or be worthy of attention – since about 1940. The more *progressive*-minded designers will, however, accept up to 1955. What often distinguishes a *conservative* from a *progressive* designer is which *outmoded* conception of art they prefer." [my emphasis]

Also when writing about the model of art as a high aesthetic activity, Fitzgerald writes: "This model is no more arguable than any that has evolved since. However, the fact is that it is *historically backward and archaic*." [my emphasis]

Much postmodern theory that is critical of the modernist view of the artist and art activities, is also critical of the progressive/conservative notion of history.

As an alternative to the progressive idea of history, postmodernist theory is more interested in the idea of an epistemological break. An epistemological break is when a whole mode of thought is no longer accessible to a culture and becomes superseded by another mode of thought. Postmodernism is a critique of modernism; it is not entirely outside it nor does it supersede it. The epistemological break taking us completely outside of modernism has not happened. To be sure, thought is moving away from a modernist mode but still, many of the conditions that made modernism possible are still with us today.

Paul Rand's discourse and the concepts that inform it, which are truly modernist, have been well criticized in the theories of the past twenty years; still, many of these modernist ideas sit well with us because they are articulations of our time. "Archaic" doesn't seem to accurately describe modernist thought, nor does "progressive" seem to accurately describe postmodern theories. Besides, these labels seem to be too deeply immersed in the very modernist theory that they are trying to critique. It would seem just as effective to call Paul Rand and his followers' ideas simply "modern," and much of the later writing, say from the 60s until now by writers such as Rosalind Krauss or Hal Foster, as "postmodern," thereby avoiding the temptation to use a modernist framework for conceptualizing history.

CRAIG SHANNON, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. After reading your last issue of *Emigre* magazine (actually the last several issues), I was extremely disappointed. There is a simple reason for my reaction; it is no longer a visual magazine. It is a contradiction to base a magazine on type and visual communication and show no examples of it. I miss the days where I would

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look to your publication for reference on type treatments and to see what new designers were doing.

Disappointed,

MITCH RATCHIK, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. That's the sound of my less-than-full brain being stretched a bit by *Emigre* #48, my first issue as a new addition to the *Emigre* mailing list.

As someone who is more or less self taught, I had a secret joy (misguided or otherwise) at having avoided design school dogma, while walking around in a state of blissful ignorance, smug that I knew all I needed to know.

Thank you *Emigre*, for offering concepts that stimulate, rather than insult, intelligence; for the noble efforts to preserve the art of typography, and for offering such a valuable resource for free.

Regards,

JAMIE BAKUM, BOSTON, MA, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. I recently read your response to numerous letters maligning your web site design in the latest issue of *Emigre* Magazine. Truth be told, your site is ugly with a capital "U". And while I applaud you for being among the first on the web to offer font purchases online, there are many others accomplishing the same thing with far more attractive interfaces than what is available on your site. (Check out T-26's site — not to mention their downloadable digital kits — or the elegantly Spartan design of the Font Bureau site.) Perhaps I'm being a bit picky, but I feel that an organization that takes such a high-brow, serious approach to typography and design might want to consider practicing what they preach. I'm not saying your site should win High Five awards, but it could at least be less painful to look at. To claim your site's appearance is sacrificed for its functionality is plain silly; the web is filled with incredibly sophisticated — and well designed — sites.

TOM COMBER, INTERNET

DEAR EMIGRE. I was reading *Emigre* #48 and eating java chip before going to bed last night and reached the last letter in your "The Readers Respond" section (I like reading the whole section straight through — you have such passionate readers!). I was disappointed and frustrated with the criticism of your web site. As I read the brief letter, I was thinking how the writer had missed the whole point of the site. Then I read the reply and I was more than pleased that you voiced my perspective exactly.

As a designer at a small advertising agency (soon to return to happy self employment), I often run into this same attitude in clients and colleagues. The idea that a web site is lame unless it offers a visually stunning presentation of bloated graphics and plug-in-driven multi-

media is exasperating. I spend a lot of time trying to help people understand that they should think less about animation and more about automation, and I want to thank you for emphasizing this to your readers.

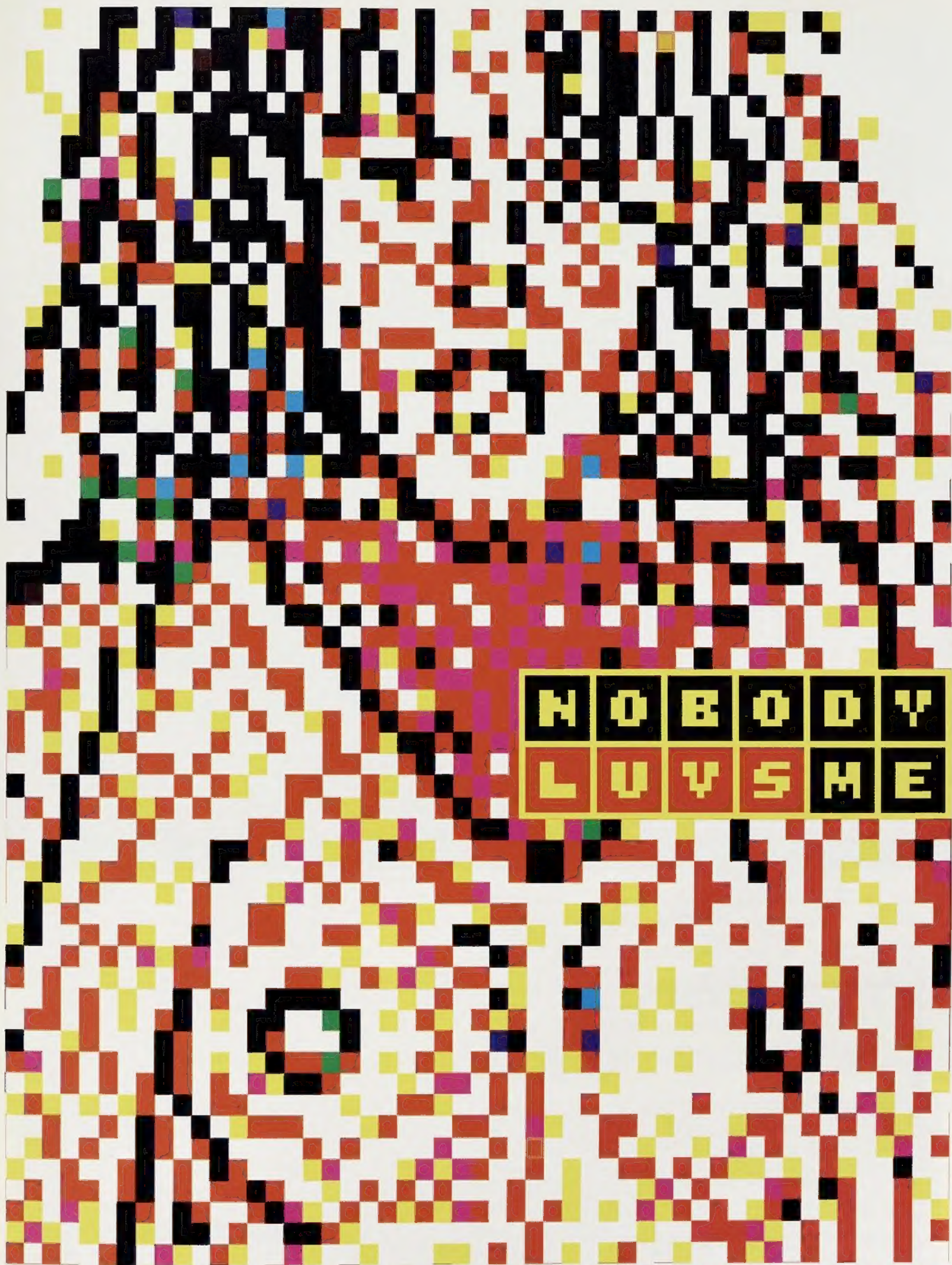
Of course, this does not mean that web sites should be ugly, or that there is no place for fancy multimedia and rich graphics. But criticizing a web site like *Emigre*'s for not being flashy enough misses the point entirely. The point is that it makes life easier. It works. *You can use it.* And I like using it. It's easy to navigate, it loads fast, it's readable and it extends your brand effectively. Good work!

So thanks for having a good site, and especially for helping others understand what makes one.

RIVER BRANDON, SPRINGFIELD, MA, INTERNET

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→ In their new media work for clients including IBM, Audi, Apple Computer and Sony, the people at MetaDesign see themselves essentially as information designers. "You don't want to over-design a desktop," says

Terry Irwin, principal and creative director of the San Francisco office. "That just tends to irritate people. It's all about subtle functionality."

In designing the Access Aptive® interface, their challenge was extending the IBM brand over the Windows® operating system in a solution transparent for the end user. "Mapping the content from the client's objectives," Irwin notes, "led us to a vocabulary of visual forms."



"We tend to use more photography than illustration," comments Rick Lowe, co-creative director. "Looking to PhotoDisc is a typical move for us because of its impressive library."

"For Aptive, we sometimes found ourselves facing critical decisions in the middle of the night. Having access to the website search engine and knowing that PhotoDisc was there for support made a real difference. What it comes down to is, the less alone you feel at 3am, the better."

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